

**VISION OF LIFE IN SELECT WORKS OF
DEVDUTT PATTANAİK**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy
(MPhil.)**

By

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DECLARATION

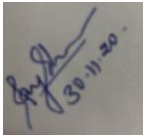
I declare that the dissertation entitled “**VISION OF LIFE IN SELECT WORKS OF DEVDUTT PATTANAİK**” submitted by me for the degree of **Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.)** is the record of work carried out by me during the period from July 2019 to November 2020 under the guidance of **Dr. (Mrs.) A. Jayasree**, Assistant Professor (SS), Department of English and has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship, Titles in this University or any other University or other similar institution of Higher Learning.

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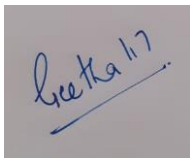
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**Signature of the
Head of the Department**



Signature of the Dean

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

The short forms used for referring to the primary sources are as follows:

RAMAYANA: SITA: AN ILLUSTRATED RETELLING OF THE RAMAYANA

MAHABHARATA: JAYA: AN ILLUSTRATED RETELLING OF THE MAHABHARATA

SHYAM: SHYAM: AN ILLUSTRATED RETELLING OF THE BHAGAVATA

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ABSTRACT

Literature is not a mere fragment of life but the quintessence of the totality of life. By holding a mirror up to life filled with the awareness of human and universal sensibilities, it impresses the readers' mind and aims at elevating human life to a higher level. Literature has acquired a great growth in diverse literary forms exploring multiple facets of human life and its experiences. Retellings have taken a fresh approach to Indian epics and its various mythical characters while challenging established norms. This has in turn inspired readers to revisit the epics. The Indian literary tradition with its mythologies and epics have inspired writers to illustrate the real social situations of the country. The reason behind the upsurge in the mythological retellings is that today's readers are interested in getting familiar with the cultural roots but with a modern perspective. The emergence of new readers who have grown up to listening to the stories and are now reading it in a language familiar to them evokes a sense of pride in Indian culture.

Devdutt Pattanaik is one of the most eminent writers in Indian Writing in English today. He holds an important place in mythology writings. The writer's ability to reinterpret the myths to suit modern sensibilities adds an inspiring touch. But apart from this, it is more intriguing, that there is a universal appeal in the way the stories are narrated right from the character's journey to the end. The synthesis of traditional mythology and modernity of the present world presented through the retellings is a message for those who are rooted to the orthodox traditionalism and also for those who are uprooted from the ethics of their own culture. Pattanaik's retelling gives emphasis to asserting the identity of women and also inspiring contemporary readers to look at the classic epics with a new enlightened perspective.

Pattanaik's writings deceptively simple and exquisite in terms of literary theory and

technique, is distinct for its voice, the well-etched characters and its philosophical depth. He is famed for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid and decorated but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises. He has the special ability to make the rhythms, intricacies and humanism of Indian life accessible to people all over India and other cultures around the world. Pattanaik typically portrays the peculiarities of human relationships and the ironies of Indian daily life, when modern urban existence clashes with ancient tradition. His style is graceful, marked by genial humour, elegance and simplicity.

The dissertation entitled *Vision of Life in Select Works of Devdutt Pattanaik* brings to focus three retellings of Devdutt Pattanaik namely; *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of The Mahabharata* *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of The Bhagavata*. The study highlights the vision of life of the writer as the retellings explore various parameters such as social consciousness, relationship between man and nature and place of women in society. A study of select works of Devdutt Pattanaik may reveal that a retelling of ancient epics provides a refreshing kaleidoscopic perspective and provides value based inspiring lessons for life. The objectives of the study are to explore the vision of life as depicted by Devdutt Pattanaik in the works chosen for study are to understand the portrayal of women in these works and highlight the relationship between women and society, to explore the depiction of nature, to highlight the significance of the retelling tradition in literature and to foster awareness about the inspiring lessons for humanity nestled in the works chosen for the study. The dissertation follows the guidelines prescribed by the MLA Handbook for Research (8th edition). The dissertation is divided into five chapters including Introduction and Summation. The Introductory chapter explores the depiction of myth in Indian Writing in English with a special mention of the significance of retellings as a tradition. The universal relevance of such

narratives of literature is highlighted. This is followed by a special focus on the life and works of Devdutt Pattanaik. The objectives of the study are also stated. The second chapter titled, 'Strife and Triumph: The Journey of Women' explores the women in the works chosen for the study highlighting their journey through multiple challenges of life as individuals. The third chapter titled, 'The Wild and the Urban: Nature as Sanctuary' explores the relationship between the human and the wilderness highlighting the need to live in conformity with Nature. The fourth chapter titled, 'Illuminating Interpretation: Retelling as an Awakening' discusses the concept of retelling and how the synthesis of traditional mythology and modernity of the present world pave the way for an illuminating literary experience. The final chapter summarises the observations of the study.

Through his retellings, Pattanaik highlights the essence of these epic tales giving the readers a chance to see a world that depicts the different shades of human life and experiences, a world that presents both the good and the bad and a world where people develop resilience and embrace reality or fight it. All the characters travelling through his verbal canvas are torch bearers of different aspects of human mind and intentions. Through them, lessons, values, ethics and principles for a good conduct of life is clearly indicated. His retellings bring to light the hitherto untold and unexplored facets of the epics making it a delightful intellectual and engaging escapade. Expression of social awareness is what makes a work of literature a unique. Literature reflects society and retellings record the journey of human life through generations facilitating a unique bridge between the past and the present providing the capability to understand and derive newer interpretations. Pattanaik's works build a bridge between the old and the new, bringing together modern perspectives and ancient narratives facilitating the creation of eternal truths in a

world plagued by transient travesties. This renders his works unmatched authenticity and a unique sensibility that will remain forever as a perennial source of inspiration for readers.

Chapter- 1

Introduction

Literature is not a mere fragment of life but the quintessence of the totality of life. By holding a mirror up to life filled with the awareness of human and universal sensibilities, it impresses the readers' mind and aims at elevating human life to a higher level. Literature has acquired a great growth in diverse literary forms exploring multiple facets of human life and its experiences. Life moulds literature of a society and literature reflects the pattern of any society. Literature influences and makes people understand every walk of life. Literature is defined as an expression of culture and society. It is an ocean juxtaposed with different kinds of emotions like love and hate, hope and despair and joy and sorrow. Girija kumar in *The Book on Trial: Fundamentalism and Censorship in India* discusses about Salman Rushdie's introspection, where he says, "Literature is where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in that human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tales, of the imagination and of the heart" (234). People are interested in listening to the stories of men and women, their lives, motives, aspirations and relationships which deal with the great drama of human life and experience. It is a medium which can express the various aspects of society through interesting forms like fiction, poetry, prose and drama. Among all these forms, fiction stands as a powerful medium to express life and it aims at reality by reshaping the elements of an individual and society.

Indian writing in English gained popularity and is recognised as a literary category because many Indians started writing in English and with this tremendous flow of writing many

great works of literature have been created. In its early stages it was influenced by Western literature and the themes used to be social or political issues. Later on, other issues related to culture and family were integrated. The modern writers take up issues related to all facets and depict the realistic view of human life. The problems of identity, gender and social consciousness have become some of the main concern of the modern writers.

India has always been very prosperous in regional literature whether it is fiction, poetry and drama. Regional literature is the branch of literature which deals with the depiction of native life presenting a language and environment that is entirely indigenous in its ethos. Adding to this, it is always been a resource of great pride among Indian writers and acknowledged as a treasure of our traditions and culture. As Vinay Dharwadker, the poet and critic has observed, “Indian-English literature by itself is inadequate to represent who are to the rest of the world. Only a broad representation of the full range of Indian literatures, translated into a world language such as English, can do what is needed” (104). Regional literature helps to keep all our ancient Kathas and fables alive. Earlier writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand have contributed a distinctive expression of Indian life and culture laced with regional flavour in their novels.

Regional literature is the foundation of a country's cultures, beliefs and traditions. It serves as a reflection of reality, a product of art, and a window to an ideology. The Holy Bible, one of the oldest written scriptures, is a compilation of tales, beliefs, and accounts that teach about Christianity. Within a span of more than a thousand years from the Prophet Moses to the Apostle Paul, Bible was written by numerous authors believed to be inspired by God's divine wisdom who tried to explain about the mysteries of life as well as set rules for one's personal faith. The same goes with Quran for Muslims, Torah for Jews, and Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads

and Vedas for the Hindus. Literature explains human values as is seen in the works of the most famous Greek Philosophers namely Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle.

The primary use of literature in ancient settings was to pass down customs, traditions, beliefs and feelings to the younger generations. In more recent times, literature has taken on a more comprehensive role of mirroring society. Long before human civilisation started in this world, stories were found among the constellations, beneath the depths of the oceans, and within the woods and netherworlds. Long before language was invented, stories were told and engraved upon stone tablets and walls carvings. Long before humans began to know how to read and write with the words that our ancestors created, literature already existed.

Myth has become a cornerstone of human civilisation, creating codes of belief, faith in rituals and tenets of morality. It brings together the natural, spiritual and cultural with human life and is seen in the traditional tales which is common to the members of a tribe, race or nation revolving around the supernatural, natural and human. Professor V. Rai in his unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation titled “Use of Myth in the Poetry of the Romantic Revival,” explains:

The roots of ancient myths are hidden in the depth of unrecorded time; hence no feet of historical imagination enable the reader to visualise explicitly the circumstances and conditions connected with their birth, growth, expansion, amalgamation and ramifications. The psychologists, anthropologists and the readers of primitive religions have succeeded to a very large extent in dissipating the obscurity and paving the way for a proper understanding of the nature and significance of the ancient myths. (3)

Myth holds communities and races more strongly than language, territory and

government and provides insights into the mysteries of life and death with a poetic richness that has startling truth and immediacy. Myth is a symbolic narrative of unknown origin which is partly traditional and ostensibly relates actual events with religious beliefs. Myth builds the treasure house of the experience of mankind which comes from the past, which is used to interpret and to contextualise something in the present with the fresh images or concepts to the society. The definition of myth by M.H. Abrams raises three points. Primarily it deals with the hereditary character of myth, secondarily the belief of the particular cultural group; and finally, the importance of the super-human beings. The role of myth is triple layered ritualistic, totemic and archetypal.

Sigmund Freud also used mythological tales as the expression of repressed instinctual drives in the unconscious world of man. He believes that myths have the power to express inner reality of man's hidden world more accurately than the scientific truths. They are like a sort of therapy which are meant for the problems of humanity and work like a barometer of human emotions which are going on in his unconscious world. In order to communicate his visionary experience, the creative writer employs certain images and forms which have existed from time immemorial.

Myth transcends the world of concrete spirituality into the mythical reality. Myth has its ontological status which is never about a thing but always about some ideas or facts. In the words of David Daiches, "the interest in archetypal patterns in poetry is often side by side with the interest in myth and the primitive mind" (19). The same can be said to be true of all forms of literature. The range of a human consciousness involves history which finds expression in myth as it amalgamates the social concerns of the present and the past. Myth is an expression of man's deepest concerns about himself and his space in the scheme of the universe and that of his

relationship with fellow beings, nature and God. It basically showcases the events which assess the relationships and privileges of important characters in building the sociological and cultural ethos. Mythology thus becomes the living religion of a tribe and a guide to the psyche of man. The writers affirm that myths have a religious basis. They vindicate man's place in the universe, interpret human life and the modern consciousness in multifarious contexts. The modern man can be perceived in the light of myths. It is relevant to quote Northrop Frye when he considers, "Myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to ritual. It is the first verbal expression of literature and is an expression of the total vision of human situation." (21). The typical forms of myth become the conventions and genres of literature. There are four main narrative genres - comedy, romance, tragedy and irony (satire) and these are 'displaced' modes of the elemental forms of myth, associated with the seasonal cycles of spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Writers have used myths in their works in order to enrich and enliven them with vigour and vitality. Aeschylus's *The Oresteion*, Virgil's *the Aeneid*, Dante's *the Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare's *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, and John Milton's *Paradise lost* are some of the notable examples where myths are abundantly used. Modern writers like James Joyce in *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot in *The Wasteland*, O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Melville in *Moby Dick* and many others have significantly woven their contemporary material on the mythic parallels. Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, Kafka, W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence are some of the other major writers who have deployed mythical or archetypal modes of expression in an age.

Meenakshi Mukherjee points out that the conscious use of myth as a literary device is a modern trend. Such mythical approaches have been used by T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and O'Neill. They have consciously used mythical situations and characters in a modern context, thereby

seeking to illuminate the predicament of contemporary man, viewing him in a larger perspective of time. It is relevant to say that T.S. Eliot was deeply influenced by Jessie Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance* and James Frazer's famous book *The Golden Bough*. Weston's book supplied him the legend of *The Grail and Fisher King*, and from *The Golden Bough* he was acquainted with a number of vegetation and fertility, myths and rituals. The myths of Adonis, Attis, Osiris and a countless drowned and hanged Gods are described by James Frazer.

Myth embodies the culture of a country, its soul and connects the past with the present which projects universality and timelessness into a work of art. Myths have been created by human beings for many reasons over thousands of years and is a superb product of humanity and a rich resource for the collective consciousness of mankind. Myths highlight customs, beliefs, attitudes of people and communities and brings fundamental unity in the diversity between the past and the present. Therefore, modern writers discover a principle of mythical patterns to sustain order and unity as opposed to the chaotic variety and complexity of the modern life. That is why, myths and legends have become a favourite realm in the world of literature. Myth provides the main outlines and the circumference of a verbal universe which is later occupied by literature as well. Literature is more flexible than myth, and fills up the universe more completely. A poet or a novelist may work in areas of human life apparently remote from the shadowy Gods and gigantic story outlines of mythology. But in all cultures mythology merges intensely into and with literature. Writers are interested in myths for its creative use while painters are interested in still-life arrangements because they find in it the essential principles of story-telling. Richard Chase has, therefore, laid stress on the literary nature of myths. He observes in his article "Foreword", Quest for Myth:

The twenties and thirties, creative artists like W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot

and a historian like Toynbee realised potentiality of the use of myth in literature and produced mythological literature. They feel that the first rate literature could be created with the juxtaposition of myth and mythic patterns for modern problems. (22)

Chase observes that writers are attracted to myth primarily because it is literature itself. It is evident when he says, Myth is literature, and it has fictional character, which is imaginatively true. Literature must be allied with myth. Somehow it is felt that the creative artist must recapture a certain magical quality, a richness of imagery and a deep sense of primeval forces to facilitate a large order of aesthetic experience. The novel can go backward and forward but its creative power runs from past to the present and from present to the future as they find in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*. The technique and scope of the novel are wider than those of myths. The characters of myths are archetypal. R.K. Narayan, an Indian novelist, remarks in his article "Gods, Demons and Others", "The mythic characters are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time. Characters become representative voices while the characters in the novels are complex and intricate. A myth is seldom historical and moral. It has a non-fictional status. Its narrative methods place little emphasis on literary authenticity. (33)

Myths thus focusses on the multidimensional existence of man as a product of his culture and his universe whereas novels largely deal with man as an individual or as a social being. A myth deals with the fundamental archetypal events and characters. The novel can present a tale of mythical story in a multidimensional way while other genres of literature may not necessarily have such freedom to achieve the same. Thus myth is a living nerve of literature which cultivates the aesthetic expression of man's desires and emotions imaginatively. Myth also serves like an

agent of supernatural calamities, which creates a whirlpool of problems that a man has to face in life. It is a fact that myth in literature has captured the imagination of creative artists in primitive as well as in modern times which in turn projects the sufferings and predicaments of man. It emerges as a powerful weapon of novelists carving out their hidden potentialities.

Myth represents the soul and spirit of Indian psyche and for Indian people, religious myths constitute true history as V.S. Naipaul realised during his second visit to India. Religious myths touches every part of the land, story within story, fable within fable that is what people saw and felt in their bones. These myths about Gods and heroes of the epics gives antiquity and wonder to the whole experience of life. The earliest forms of narratives found in the *Puranas* can be considered as mythic narratives where a dialogue between an exponent and an inquirer is interspersed with the dialogues and observations of other individuals. If the epics treat the legendary actions of heroes as that of mortal men, the *Puranas* celebrate the powers and works of Gods. But the most characteristic feature of the *Puranas* is that they are essentially diffused and expansive dealing with almost every topic of interest to mankind.

Indian fiction in English has its basis in myths, particularly Hindu mythology, originated from the cosmological myths of the Rigveda. The Harappa civilisation of the Indus Valley, cultivated a Goddess of the Great Mother, who appears to have passed into Hindu myth as Parvati, the consort of Shiva, later known as the divine Mother of the Universe. The main deities in Hindu mythology are Vishnu and Shiva. Vishnu acts in his thirty-two avatars. The chief of these *avatars* were born as Ram and Krishna in the different ages. Ram is considered as a vegetation-God who was born to remove 'evil' by killing a terrible demon, the king of Lanka, Ravana. The battle between Ram and Ravana is really a battle between *Dharma* and *Adharma*. Ram's victory is the victory of *Dharma*. It reflects the conflict between good and evil.

Myth of Krishna signifies the concept of love, ideal as well as physical. He is not only a great warrior but a great teacher-philosopher who in the *Bhagavad Gita* describes the whole organisation of Earth to Arjun and preaches principles of life to the world. He like Ram, is an avatar to kill Kamsa, the great evil doer and the King of Mathura. As he grows up, he creates a world of love by infatuating Gopis, the divine milkmaids, especially Radha and he enjoys Raslila which expresses the power of love. Shiva, like Krishna, is another avatar of creation and preservation of mortality. He is a symbol of erotic power lingam and Parvati as a symbol of yoni or vulva. They have the power of creation. Shiva is not only the God of generative power and God of the dance but he is also the guardian of mortality. Both Rama and Krishna are also the body of Shiva. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are the trinity - God of creation, destruction and preservation of mortality.

Hindu mythology finds its fullest expression in the Indian epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the holy books like the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Shiv Purana* and the *Durga Saptasati*. These Indian classics serve as a source of narrative models to Indian English novelists. The Indian English novelists while searching for these roots in the past discover the mythical patterns in the realm of timelessness. They have not aped their European counterparts but have gone back to the mythology of their own cultural roots in order to forge significant patterns of fiction. The stories of ancient Indian mythology thus have always been a source of inspiration to the Indian novelists in English. It is apt to quote Jawaharlal Nehru saying, "I do not know of any books anywhere which have exercised such a continuous pervasive influence on the mass mind as these two - *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*. Dating back to a remote antiquity, they are still a living force in the life of the Indian people" (39).

In India, there was a time when sitting in front of the television and watching *The Mahabharata*, *The Ramayana* and any other adaptation of mythological stories was almost like a family ritual. The valour of the leads, the beauty and courage of the female protagonists, the larger-than-life persona and elegance of how they held themselves were enough to make anyone swoon. The tales were told through generations almost hypnotising the children who held on to every word like the absolute truth weaving a world of their own and always imagining themselves as the leads. The main reason for the popularity of mythological stories is because they offer something for everyone. Mythological literature has become a genre in itself, with more and more writers giving wings and words, to their imaginations.

During the 1930s, most of the Indian novelists started writing fiction in English and used myth in their novels. They looked into the realm of their past experiences and brought out the contemporary reality in a meaningful way by associating the past experiences with the present ones. If English writers went to ancient myths and legends, juxtaposed them with the facts of modern life, and brought out the similarities and contraries between the past and the present, Indian novelists in English also discussed the complexity and intricacy of modern life in their novels. The mythical method proved a viable tool to handle the complexity and chaos of modern life. Eminent Indian novelists in English from the Pre-Independence period to the 1960s, who used myths in their novels, are Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Sudhindra Nath Ghosh and Bhabani Bhattacharya. The next generation novelists who used myths in their novels are Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande, Shashi Tharoor and Vikram Chandra to name a few. They skillfully counterpoint myth and modernity in their fiction. For the Pre-independent novelists like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Sudhindra Nath Ghosh, myths used in their novels are based on *Puranic* narratives. Mulk Raj Anand is basically a social

crusader and humanist critic. Many of his novels depict the topsy-turvy life of contemporary society, but his novel *The Old Woman* and *the Cow* draws special attention to life and society. It is a highly mythical novel which is replete with the myth of Sita. Anand has mastered his own design, dimension and dignity with which the novel is graced.

Raja Rao has employed myth in his novels following the ancient oral *Puranic* tradition of *Akhyana*, which weaves the tangled webs of episodes in a literary fashion. He makes the digressional use of myth in his novels *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965). His digressional technique can be associated with the ancient Indian technique of narration but his novels contextualise and mythologise contemporary reality. His fiction has a typical Indian ethos dipped into Indian classics which is found everywhere in his works. He has cravings of his own rich Indian past and correlates his mythical experience with the experience of the immediate present. His novels reveal the philosophical themes of selfless action, self-knowledge and self-surrender which are treated as the three ways of deliverance from the bondage of life. Raja Rao perceives a vast panorama of human emotions and experience in the mythical perception in his novels, which establishes his distinctive quality as a novelist.

Kanthapura is a political and Gandhian novel which has localised myth. Moorthy of the village has become a local Gandhi and *Kanthapura* appears as a political battlefield of India. The village reminds us of the whole country. Like *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata*, *Kanthapura* is a work of the higher order and it depicts a realistic picture of the social, political and economic awakening which took place in the early decades in Indian villages. Unlike Raja Rao and Sudhindra Ghosh, R.K. Narayan makes structural use of myth in *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961) and myth in digressional manner especially in *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Painter of Signs*

(1976) and *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983). *Mr. Sampath* not only refers to India's hoary antiquity but also introduces characters and stories from the Indian epics and the *Puranas* which took place in Malgudi. One can witness the comic burning of God Kamadeva by God Shiva's third eye in the novel. The use of Bhasmasura myth in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*, Santanu-Ganga legend in *The Painter of Signs* and Siddhartha's enlightenment in *A Tiger of Malgudi*, highlight R.K. Narayan as a myth-making novelist. The use of varied myths in fictional structures manifests the novelist's balanced vision of human life. In his novels there is a total religious involvement in which characters live and enjoy visiting temples and performing religious rituals. References of temples like Hanuman Temple, Laxmi Temple in *The Financial Expert* and the portrayal of Sanyasis in *The Dark Room*, *The Financial Expert*, *Bachelor of Arts* and *A Tiger for Malgudi* reveal his deep rooted faith in Hindu religion and that of Indian ethos.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels deal with the naked and horrible reality of society. The novel *So Many Hungers* unfolds the story of hunger and starvation of the historical famine of Calcutta and Bengal. *He who Rides a Tiger* records not only the misery and suffering of the poor but also the cruelty of the rich. It shows how the rulers of society grind and exploit the weak and the poor. The novel exposes the baseless nature of religion where starving people satisfy their soul in protecting their faith in the name of God and as a result, sacrifice everything to the temple. Bhattacharya has depicted it in the mythic framework which is governed by Kaliyuga. *His So Many Hungers* and *He who Rides a Tiger* describe the post-independent India as the Kaliyuga of mythical India. *He who Rides a Tiger* deals with the myth of Kali while *Music for Mohini* and *A Goddess Named Gold* are also mythically treated as his characters of the novels have mythical resemblances. Lachmi appears as Lakshmi, Meera Bai as Meera in his novel. *A Goddess for Gold* deals with the Goddess Lakshmi. *Shadow from Ladakh* is highly symbolical in

which the novelist portrays political figures as the divine characters.

Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande and Shashi Tharoor emerge as the representative novelists who use myths effectively in their novels for shaping the contemporary reality. Salman Rushdie's novels *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are of high eminence. *Grimus* contains Persian, Greek and Norse myths. In *Shame* Rushdie has created the myth of Sufiya Zinobia whereas *The Ground beneath Her Feet* is imbued with the Greek myths of *Orpheus* and *Eurydice*. In all these novels his use of myth depicts the contemporary against the universal. Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* employs the major myth of Ram and Sita. Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* reflects myths from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and *Katha Upanishad*. Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* is a highly mythical novel which deals with the ancient Indian Upanishadic myth of Nachiketa. To Ghosh, mythical figures are the most suitable paradigms in order to explore and interpret the malady of modern ethos. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is a crucial commentary on the political history of modern India. The novel is modelled on the great Indian epic *The Mahabharata*

Many contemporary Indian English novelists reinterpret contemporary socio-political history through the use of mythical figures. They represent the socio-political situations gaining ground in the post Nehruvian India which becomes the part of their post-colonial discourse. They project a new history in the light of mythical framework which decides their fate in the sands of time. The contemporary fiction builds a timeless history in the light of mythical figures which ranges from ancient, medieval to modern age. History in contemporary novels is treated as a greater source of human consciousness. Therefore, the novelists like Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor present a 'perspective history' or a 'future history'. Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth*

and *Pouring Rain* in 1995 is a parody of *Mahabharata* and *Arabian Nights*. Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* in 1998 is an interesting rewriting of the Shakuntala tale.

Another famous mythological author, Chitra B Divakaruni's novel, *A Palace of Illusions*, retells the story of *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's point of view. The novel is known for portraying Draupadi as a real human being with feelings and ambitions and not merely as a naïve princess. Kavita Kane writes about the forgotten female characters of the great Indian epics. Her stories are famous for retelling the tales through the point of view of women, thus giving a much-needed insight into the life and aspirations of female characters. Her works include *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen*; *Sita's Sister*; *Menaka's Choice*; and *Lanka's Princess*. These books tell the same old tales of good and evil, love and rivalry but from a different point of view, shedding light on the views of the female characters and the way they see the world.

Amish Tripathi is famous for the *Shiva Trilogy* which focusses on a man's journey and how his legend turned him into a God. The book is based primarily on the idea that Gods were human beings first and their actions elevated them to that position. His books are famous for combining myths with fiction and for creating a new world for the same. Widely regarded as one of India's best-selling conspiracy-fiction writers, Ashwin Sanghi is known for combining history, theology and mythology for his works. Often compared to Dan Brown, Sanghi is a conspiracy fiction writer. His books like *The Krishna Key* and *Rozabal Line* are acclaimed critically and remain popular in terms of sales.

Amongst all these writers, Devdutt Pattanaik stands tall and illustrious by virtue of his rich repertoire of works replete in Indian mythology. Devdutt Pattanaik, an Indian author is known for his work in mythological interpretations of ancient Indian scriptures, stories, symbols

and rituals. He is known as mythologist, author, speaker and illustrator. Devdutt Pattanaik was born on 11th December 1970, Mumbai, India. Pattanaik is an Odia, born and brought up in Mumbai. He spent his childhood and student life in Chembur, Mumbai. He studied in Our lady of Perpetual Succour High School in Chembur where he first got acquainted with stories of the Ramayana in school plays. He graduated in M.B.B.S from Grant Medical College, Mumbai and later time he did a course in Comparative Mythology from Mumbai University.

His first phase of career was in the pharma and health care industry for fourteen years. He spent his spare time writing articles and books on mythology, which eventually became his full-time passion. He has also worked as a consultant at Ernst and Young Multinational Professional Service. He was a speaker at the first TED conference held in India in November 2009. He is also a story consultant. He is the author of 41 books and over 1000 columns, which construct the subjective truth of myths. Pattanaik writes prolifically on mythology. He has written books not only on Indian mythology but also in the various spheres of life of a common man.

Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana approaches the story of Ram through the eyes of Sita. Her childhood with her father, Janaka, who hosted sages mentioned in the Upanishads; her stay in the forest with her husband, who had to be a celibate ascetic while she was in the prime of her youth; her interactions with the women of Lanka, recipes she exchanged, emotions they shared; her connection with the earth, her mother, and with the trees, her sisters; her role as the Goddess, the untamed Kali as well as the demure Gauri, in transforming the stoic prince of Ayodhya into God is beautifully captured by Pattanaik. *Jaya; An Illustrated Retelling of The Mahabharata* tells the story of Kuru family and the events that lead to the fratricidal Mahabharata war. It describes the events during the eighteenth day war and its aftermath. It was originally published on 16th August 2010. Devdutt Pattanaik has consciously sustained the use of

myth and folklore in his novels where myth and symbol emerge as the significant creative models for conveying a meaningful world-view of human drama as human reality and a part of shared human experience. *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of The Bhagavata* tells the story of Krishna, known as Shyam to those who find beauty, wisdom and love in his dark complexion. It is the third great Hindu epic after the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. This book weaves the story from Krishna's birth to his death and was originally published in 2018.

Myth is a powerful literary device which helps the Indian English novelists to interpret modern India in the light of ancient mythical India. Myth also helps the contemporary writers for exploring their own existential concerns in the contemporary social context which makes their work good and great. Pattanaik covers his novel with different retellings and consciousness of the epics. His works incorporate social, humanistic and gender based narratives while exploring the epic characters who are placed at the crossroads of multiple conflicts between the inner and the outer world.

A review of some of the published research papers and articles are as follows. Madhulika Dash in her PhD research "Wronged, Wrong Sita: a Feminist Critique of Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*", focuses on the feminist perspective, elucidations of Sita's ceremonies, bonding with the nature. The sense of identity reminisces about her power and wisdom. Vidya Shankar Shetty in her Ph.D dissertation entitled "Challenging Stereotypes: A Study on the on the Unexplored Voices in Selected Works of Devdutt Pattanaik" says, "Where Pattanaik's works differ from the other writers is in the style in which he adheres to the original version of the epics and yet explores the hidden personality of these women" (130). Komil Tyagi in her article entitled "Narrative, Norms, and Nation: Exploring the Prospect of 'Sitarajya' through Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*" published in the

journal *Dialogue* observes:

Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana, structures the minor discourses so well that one draws 'Sitarajya' as a utopian state that lays equal concentration on all relevant paradigms. The understanding of women as dependents; in the form of daughters, wives and mothers is subverted through Pattanaik's text. During the period of exile, Sita does not behave as a reliant at all in his retelling. Unlike the ancient chronicle where she is projected as tiresome, dependant and trailing, Sita brings her forth as someone who continues presenting her acquired and assimilated intellect to the deprived brothers. Her debates on Dharma, nature, charity, exploitation, selflessness, and other ingredients of society make her a perfect companion. (8)

Sneha Tripathi and Dr. Tejal Jani in their article "DEVDUTT PATTANAİK'S EXPLORATION ON MYTH" observe that, "He is well-versed in Indian mythologies giving insights about variations in the perception and analysis of Indian mythological stories and Indian culture".

A study of select works of Devdutt Pattanaik may reveal that a retelling of ancient epics provides a refreshing kaleidoscopic perspective and provides value based inspiring lessons for life. The three works chosen for the study are *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata*. The objectives of the study, to explore the vision of life as depicted by Devdutt Pattanaik in the works chosen for study are to understand the portrayal of women in these works and highlight the relationship between women and society, to explore the depiction of nature, to highlight the significance of the retelling tradition in literature and to foster awareness about the inspiring lessons for humanity nestled in the works chosen for the study. The dissertation

follows the guidelines prescribed by the MLA Handbook for Research (8th edition). The dissertation is divided into five chapters including Introduction and Summation. The Introductory chapter explores the depiction of myth in Indian Writing in English with a special mention of the significance of retellings as a tradition. The universal relevance of such narratives of literature is highlighted. This is followed by a special focus on the life and works of Devdutt Pattanaik. The objectives of the study are also stated. The second chapter titled, 'Strife and Triumph: The Journey of Women' explores the women in the works chosen for the study highlighting their journey through multiple challenges of life as individuals. The third chapter titled, 'The Wild and the Urban: Nature as Sanctuary' explores the relationship between the human and the wilderness highlighting the need to live in conformity with Nature. The fourth chapter titled, 'Illuminating Interpretation: Retelling as an Awakening' discusses the concept of retelling and how the synthesis of traditional mythology and modernity of the present world pave the way for an illuminating literary experience. Pattanaik's retelling gives emphasis to asserting the identity of women and also inspiring contemporary readers to look at the classic epics with a new enlightened perspective. The final chapter summarises the observations of the study.

Chapter -2

Strife and Triumph: The Journey of Women

Literature encapsulates a unique and invaluable record of man's physical, mental and spiritual journey through various ages since the dawn of creation. Such awareness also gives a wider range, a greater authenticity and liveliness to a literary work. A writer's concern with their immediate social scenario has come to be considered as not only an important but also a necessary virtue. It always performed this function of strengthening the notion of a society as an entity, continuing into a future. One of the distinctive features of modern literature is its increased social consciousness and concern. As important concern of their social consciousness continues to be the issues related to women. Charles H. Cooley in his article "Social Consciousness", defines the term:

Social consciousness is a wide ranging and all inclusive term that automatically refers to culture, ideology, religion, socio-political economic factors operating in society that largely go in the making of consciousness of an individual in life.

Consciousness is the state or faculty of being conscious, as a condition and the concomitant of all thoughts, feelings and volitions, the recognition by the thinking subjects of its own acts or affections. (64)

Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's mind. It signifies the totality of impressions, thoughts and feelings which makes up a person's conscious being. The concept of social consciousness involves a web of attitudes, tendencies, desires, ideologies and culture that a

writer likes. Pattanaik subtly and imperceptibly weaves the elements of social consciousness with special focus on the strifes and triumphs of women as individuals into the very warp and weft of his works.

Karl Marx, in his article, says “Human beings enter into certain productive, or economic, relations and these relations lead to a form of social consciousness” (1). In the social production of the life, humans enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. Social consciousness is linked to the collective self- awareness and experience of collectively shared social identity. By the experience of the collectively shared social identity, individuals may experience social unity. Karl Marx also identifies that humans can also distinguished consciousness from animals. In his article “Consciousness Derived From Material Conditions From The German Ideology” he states that the “the first form of ownership is tribal, this is when people lived by hunting or fishing, their division of work was within families and was under a patriarchal order”(13). Devdutt Pattanaik states that human estrange themselves from the individual within, as well as from relationships with other individuals. He says one expands one’s consciousness and outgrows the ways of the jungle. It means that while an animal is driven by the instinct to see other creatures as predator, prey, rival or mate, humans have the ability to outgrow such instincts and empathise with the other. It expands consciousness and helps to adopt rules and traditions and follow *dharma*.

The writers like R.K. Narayanan, Mulk Raj Anand, Premchand Gurucharan Das, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sri Aurobindo, M. Shubba, Kishan Barai, Bama, C.S.Lakshmi and Mahasweta Devi use social consciousness as a tool to express the age- old tales in a new light. They treat this theme as a document for highlighting social struggles and as a weapon for nationalistic voice. As modern writers they impact this theme in an attempt to portray social

truths as a vehicle of change and reforms. Pattanaik's works embody a strong sense of consciousness about the evils of social injustice and suppression of women. In India, the social novels subject the social system to a thorough scrutiny. Pattanaik highlights the predicament of man in a world surrounded by inimical forces both in nature and in human institutions and man in relation to himself and his family.

Change has become an integral part of society. The disintegration of the old hierarchical and agrarian society and the break-up of the joint family is one of the major factors of social change. The break-up of family ties and subsequent disintegration of the older values of life have always had an appeal irrespective of race, community, religion and class. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article "Twice born" says that "The concern of the Indian English novel today is the ultra-historical modern man whose individuality and personal life are shaped by factors of history"(27). The fabric of social consciousness includes the man- woman relationship that is of perennial significance. The western contexts celebrate individualism largely whereas the Indian contexts focusses largely on the individual as a victim of a very powerful social force, the family, particularly the joint family. The family is an integral part of life and central to the Indian ethos. In India duty towards the family is placed on a higher esteem. Rituals, adherence to faith, superior wisdom of a Guru shape the conduct of many people. Hari Mohan Prasad in his article "Response;Recent Revelations of Indian Fiction in English" says "Tradition in India is wrapped in the crannies of nature, in the rituals and religion , in the collective , simple living of the villagers, in the emotional integration of large families"(24-25).

In *Mahabharata Social Consciousness In Contemporary Writing:Challenging Ideology*, R. Shashidhar observes, "Consciousness does not deny things, its function on the contrary is to speak of them; quite simply it purifies them and makes them innocent, fixes them in nature and

eternity, gives them a clarity which is not explained but of statement”(21). By clinging to the consciousness, people try to learn values. Even though their thoughts are old, it revives to live in the present life. The value of thoughts function as a resultant of self- power and individual realisation. Terry Eagleton has mentioned about the individual life in his work *Literary Theory:An Introduction*:

The way in which what we say and believe connects with the power structure and power relations of the society live in..not simply the deeply entrenched often unconscious beliefs held, but rather...more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving, and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power (19)

Pattanaik says myths and traditional old stories are the two emotive threads which connect both traditional retelling and socially valuable thoughts. S.L Bhyrappa’s views on retelling in his magnum opus *Parva*, opines that “Basic intention was not to rewrite the epic, but to seek answers to some of the haunting questions in life, such as Death, Sexuality and Human relationships”(22). The retelling experience upholds the highest way of easiest reading with the characters taking different trajectories of exploration such as balance between the man and nature, tradition, juxtaposition of the dependent and independent, survival, relationship between individual and the society and the like. Myth examines them and helps to relocate their identities within the amalgamation of cultural and religious beliefs.

Devdutt Pattanaik, who attempts to extrapolate the concept of myth in his writings portrays the various retellings and the traditional beliefs in the epics, exploring the characters in terms of explaining their individual identity. The idea of retelling to some extent is used to show

their struggle to reconnect with their family or with their inherent selves and also conveys their strong emotions in the process. Pattanaik explicitly conveys that the problem of an individual is not a simple one; predominantly individuals have been caught between the family rituals, customs and also their inner conflicts which never allow them to survive independently. He also highlights that the characters face individual struggle to attain their real identity, which is based on their own experiences, traditional beliefs and collective memories. As a writer, he interprets various illustrations by connecting the character with mythical perspectives. Pattanaik has produced insights into changes which are occurring in society and how individual mythical character befalls into the social system and gets caught in traditional and cultural beliefs. Through the characters in his three retellings chosen for the study, Pattanaik has shown a good grasp of Indian thoughts, emotion and culture. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita; An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana* is preoccupied with the elements of myth, as the characters try to find their identity and also attempt to maintain the culture of own country while struggling to adopt the culture and space of a new land. The novel is about the Sita, the daughter of Mother Earth and her relationships with family, nature and the country.

The great modern poet, T.S.Eliot has adopted the mythical method in his magnum opus *The Waste Land*. By adopting this technique he links the predicament of modern humanity with that of other ages of human history, turning the contemporary malaise into an eternal problem of man. Thus Eliot has intertwined many mythical strands in order to form a complex traditional background to explain the nature and measure the depth of the spiritual waste land which is contemporary history. Like the great poet T.S.Eliot, Shashi Deshpande has also adopted the mythical method in her short stories in order to bring out the contemporary reality about women. In a country like India where on the one hand, a woman is equated with man through the concept

of Ardhangini, on the other hand, there are daily reports of bride-burning, dowry harassment and rape. Pattanaik employs his writings as a vehicle to probe into the lives and experiences of women. Myths have a specific purpose. In her article “Myth”, Shashi Deshpande says, "Myth have given us a moral framework by which we live" (2). Pattanaik on his choice of the stories from the epics points out that they have an important place in all our lives. In most of the stories the reader is face to face with the celebrated women characters of the great Indian epic. These women namely, Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, Amba and Gandhari are illustrious icons of Indian mythology. These are the characters that are admired, adored and idealised for their perfect feminine attributes. The writer Nirmala Prakash in her interview in Midday has rightly commented on the mythical method adopted by Devdutt Pattanaik, "By adopting a refreshingly new approach, the author relates the past to find its meaning in the present"(4). This myth contributes to the contemporary women's experiences and thus by reinterpreting them, Pattanaik thus moves from femininity to feminism and also makes the characters credible through the authenticity of the mythical context. The angelic halo that surrounds the mythical characters of these stories blends perfectly with the cultural ethos of India. Shashi Deshpande comments on the importance of myths and the purpose they serve in real life writes in the 'Afterword' to the book *The Stone Women*:

Myths are still important to us. We do not want to demolish them, we need them to live by; they have shaped our ideas for a great many years, they embody our dreams. To destroy them would be to leave a large dent in the fabric of our culture. On the other hand, if we are not able to make them meaningful to our lives, they will cease to survive. In India, specially, myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truths about themselves, about the human

condition. (7)

The stories of ancient mythology have always been a source of inspiration to the literary artist. Myth therefore was the symbolic presentation of a primitive man's instinct in a world interpenetrated with a super-rational or extra-rational activity. In *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling Of The Ramayana*, there are plants that talk and animals that think, Gods who fail and demons who triumph; heroic villains and villainous heroes; sages and hunters; victims and seducers. Time twists and space unfolds as the narration proceeds. In *The Ramayana*, when the sea is about to rise and submerge all the lands, Lord Vishnu takes the form of a small fish and begs humanity to save him from bigger fish. The man who responds to his cries becomes Manu, the founder of a new social order. Manu refers to the archetypal man or the first man. Brahma conducts Yagna and through *Agni*, he establishes life, culture and nature. Culture is the domesticated Gauri, but nature is the sovereign Kali. Both are forms of Shakti, the Goddess.

Sita and Ram are always at peace in the palace and in the forest; neither is overawed by culture or intimidated by nature. Tapasya makes them wise; yagna enables them to convey love. Together, they establish dharma, the best a human can do in continuously changing contexts, despite being judged differently by different people. Events in the tale are a consequence of the past and the cause of the future. It cannot be seen in isolation, at least not in a Hindu context. To do so is to see the stars and miss the sky. *The Ramayana* is not a single text, even multiple texts. It is a belief, a tradition, a subjective truth, a thought materialised, ritualised and celebrated through narrations, songs, dances, sculptures, plays, paintings and puppets across hundreds of locations, over hundreds of years.

Retelling has many tributaries and many branches. Each has its own essence, focusing on

different plots, different characters and different aspects of the human condition each one innovatively recreating as well as contributing to the plots and themes. Pattanaik explains in his *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, “Ram-Katha, Ram –Leela, Ram- Akhyan, Ram-Charita, Ram-Kirti or Ram-Kavya venerable is its ability to uplift the spirits despite or even because of the disturbing aspects of the tale” (78). Modern retellings are more political and less reverent, more judgemental and less enquiring. In spirit, they are very different from the *Ramayana* that nourish the Indian soul. They share the same literary narrative but not the same emotional narrative. The Goddess in Hindu scriptures is not the female version of God favoured by feminists, nor is God the all- powerful, judgemental external agency described in the Bible, who sets down codes of conduct and determines what is right and wrong. God is not even the deified hero of Greek mythology, which greatly informs the modern rational and atheist discourse. Goddess and God have very particular meanings in the Hindu understanding of the Universe.

Indian thought, particularly Hindu thought, starts with an observation, the human ability to imagine that enables us to position oneself outside nature. Human mind is potentially God while nature is always the Goddess. The notion of creation, preservation and destruction in Hindu mythology deals with culture not nature. The subtle interplay of word and meaning can easily be misunderstood and often people live in a world that is dominated by the western discourse shaped by Greek and Biblical mythology that are in turn more comfortable with tangible, measurable and categorisable actions and things than abstract thoughts. Pattanaik says in his work *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*:

Within infinite myths lies an eternal truth

Who sees it all?

Varuna has but a thousand eyes

Indra, a hundred

You and I, only two (15)

Few have been able to fathom the hold of this two thousand five hundred year old narrative over the Indian psyche, especially those who see the epic as irrational but modern education as a tool to make people rational. In 2013, *The Ramayana* continues to be referred to in articles that speak of the unsatisfactory status of women in India. Appropriated by politicians, criticised by feminists and deconstructed by academicians, the epic stands serene in its majesty giving joy, hope and meaning to millions. Raymond Williams in his drama *Isben and Brecht*, says "Myth means many things from plot, and tale to fable in modern usage it is not merely a false version of reality but also a representation of different kind of reality"(6).

Frazer is one of the architect of modern thoughts. Any ritual for him is used in latent imagination. A ritual is associated with magic and religion. When faith is lost it becomes a work of imagination. Pattanaik shows how human imagination is related to a motive by assigning symbolic meaning to rituals. He stresses on the importance of myth in making religion appealing not merely to faith or belief, but also to imagination. Hence, a writer uses myths in his writings to bring wider connotation and perspective. In the classics, myths are used in place of images to project the hidden truths. Myth can be an image, a symbol, and a metaphor.

Across India there are villages and towns that associate themselves with events in the *Ramayana*. In Mumbai, there is a water tank called Banaganga created by the bana (arrow) of

Ram. Writing Ram's name is a popular expression of devotion, in fact, there is a 'Ram Ram Bank' in Ayodhya where people even today deposit booklets of Ram's name as Ram nam. The Hindu mythic world has three layers, the sky inhabited by *Devas*, *Apsaras* and *Gandharvas*, the nether regions inhabited by *Asuras* and *Nagas*, the earth inhabited by humans, *Rakshasas* and *Yakshas*. Traditional Indian thought prefers to liberate *The Ramayana* from the limits imposed by time and space. Ram of academics is bound to be a period and place. The incarnation appears of a God, spirit, or soul in earthly form. According to *The Ramayana*, Ram was the seventh incarnation of the God Vishnu.

To the people of India, indeed, this epic has been an unflinching and perennial source of spiritual strength. Learnt at the mother's knee with reverence and love, it has inspired great men to heroic deeds as well as enabled the humble to face their trials with fortitude and faith. Sita is associated with vegetation, especially grass. Her second son Kush is named after the Kush grass. Kush grass is a long, sharp grass that is essential ingredient of Vedic rituals. Those performing the yagna sit on its mats made of this grass and tie a ring of the grass around their finger. It is used as a torch to carry fire and as a broom to sweep. The Puranas link it to Brahma's hair, Vishnu's hair and Sita's hair.

The Mahabharata was composed many thousand years ago. But generations of gifted reciters have added to Vyasa's original a great mass of material. All the floating literature that was thought to be worth preserving, historical, geographical, legendary, political, theological and philosophical, of nearly thirty centuries, found a place in it. The characters in the epic move with the vitality of real life. "Bhishma, the perfect knight, the venerable Drona. The vain but chivalrous Karna; Duryodhana, whose perverse pride is redeemed by great courage in adversity, the high souled Pandavas with God like strength as well as power of suffering. Draupadi, most

unfortunate of queens; Kunti, the worthy mother of heroes; Gandhari, the devoted wife and sad mother of the wicked sons of Dhritarashtra” (78). These are some of the immortal figures on that crowded, but never confused, canvas. Then there is great Krishna himself, most energetic of men, whose divinity scintillates through a cloud of human characteristics. His sense of high purposefulness pervades the whole epic.

Pattanaik 's retellings reveal images which intensify and expand and provides grandeur of design to the characters. The eternal patterns of creative and destructive forces existing on a different planes of living loaded in the essence of myth and ritual enthral the readers. Devdutt Pattanaik does not use myth and legend as embellishment. Myths, legends and folklores are deeply engrained in the Indian psyche especially those which are found in the epics and the Puranas. These stories and myths have become a part and parcel of our sensibilities. *"The Inner Rooms"* depicts the plight of Amba and her two sisters, Ambika and Ambalika. In the *Mahabharata*, Amba is kidnapped by Bhishma as a bride for Vichitravirya. Her lover Salva tries to protect her, but is defeated by Bhishma. She is then taken to Vichitravirya whom she tells of her love for Salva. She tells him that as she had pledged to marry Salva, she would not marry any other man. Amba is sent back to Salva. But now Salva rejects her on the grounds that she has been in custody of Bhishma and that he cannot marry a woman who has lived with another man. Left with no choice, Amba returns to Vichitravirya who also refuses to marry her as she belongs to Salva, She turns to Bhishma again in desperation, but he has already taken the oath of celibacy. Amba then immolates herself, vowing to avenge herself in the next life.

The abduction of these three sisters by authoritative Bhishma foregrounds the principles of patriarchal authority. The rules of the game are formulated by the mighty like Bhishma to overpower the Ambas of the world. But Amba, unlike her sisters understands the game plan of

Bhishma. She declines to marry Vichitravirya. Her rejection is an act of defiance. But in her defiance she invokes the laws of the same authority that wishes to see her act as a feminine. She reveals her love for Salva in the open court to free herself from the snare of Bhishma. She has the courage to assert herself at the most crucial moment as she announces, "I cannot marry this man. I had already chosen Salva, king of Saubha, before I was brought here. I had promised myself to him."(145). Simon De Beaviour says "She was only a woman, she was to be disregarded and ignored; her will, her emotions had to be set aside as nothing because she was a woman."(90). A woman is to be neglected is the message women have been receiving since time immemorial.

The narrator reflects the tortured sensibility of a woman who is not prepared to compromise with male domination. Instead of living a life of humiliation, she prefers to embrace death. Her free will, thus, reigns supreme, if not in life, at least in death. Thus, *The Mahabharata* recaptures Amba's last moments. During these minutes, she recapitulates the humiliation that has been meted out to her by each of the three men - Salva, Vichitravirya and Bhishma. Neither of them has spared a thought for her feelings. Instead, she has been tossed from one man to another - like a football on a playground. The men have used her as a pawn in their own power game, justifying their actions with quaint ideas of honour. When each of them refuses to marry her, she is left a social outcaste. Penelope Brown observes that "...In order to survive a woman must, by kinship and later by marriage, be attached to a man"(9). By being kidnapped, Amba had lost her father's protection. By being rejected by each of the men, she cannot attain the status of a wife. She is cast out of all the roles specific to a woman in Indian society. She is left with no choice but to die because traditionally a woman cannot exist outside a man's jurisdiction. Her self-immolation symbolises the extreme form of expression of hostility. As a woman in a male dominated society, she is unable to release her pent-up resentment and anger. For her, the only

way out is death. But after prayers she takes rebirth as a man to kill Bhishma in the battle of Kurukshetra.

While it is true that the modern Indian woman is not restricted to the unidimensional existence of Amba, it also cannot be denied that she is still expected to conform to the constructs and role ideals laid down by a patriarchal society. Deviation from accepted norms brings censure and alienation. Thus, the modern Indian woman is torn between her own aspirations and social expectations. She is still treated as an object, as many of the mythical stories exemplify. Similarly *The Ramayana* deals with the sorrow and suffering of Sita. Sita, in *The Ramayana*, had become a victim of the traditional notion of male honour. Kidnapped by Ravana, she is rescued by Ram and undergoes *agnipariksha* to prove her purity and fidelity. Even though she comes out of the ordeal unblemished, her ordeal does not end there. At the instance of a washerman's derogatory remark about her character, she is again asked to go into exile. The justification is that she is unfit to be queen if any of her subjects doubts her chastity; her questionable chastity would also tarnish the king's image. The oppressiveness of her situation lies in the fact that she is condemned to a life of hardship and loneliness just because Rama must have a clean image before his subjects. Sita understands Rama's design, and furiously asks Lakshmana: "How many people have to become small so that one may become great?" (249). Pattanaik constructs the ideals enveloping the Sita myth as she portrays her as an utterly devalued human being in a patriarchal society, in which a woman is of no consequence.

In both the epics, Pattanaik challenges the existing patriarchal mindset and provokes introspection. They also suggest the need to create new ideal for women. The writers Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal have rightly commented in an article "Epics to be Retold" that "*Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*" and "*Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of The Mahabharat*"

recreate moments of crisis from the lives of Amba and Sita but from a postmodern stance. These epics can be called the idealistic type stories in that they subvert existing reality and try to create new ideals for Indian women. They are postmodern stories because they offer a double reading of traditional myths and their simultaneous subversion” (22). In these works, Pattanaik does not draw upon Hindu myths as behavioural paradigms but to turn them on their head and expose the patriarchal ideologies hidden in them.

Pattanaik's retellings also deal with the vexation and anguish of Draupadi after having been humiliated by the Kauravas in the open court. Her protest has its roots in her realisation that a woman's insult is treated so lightly. Draupadi is bent upon starting war against the Kauravas. But on the other hand, Yudhishtira and Krishna are still working on a plan to avoid war. Yudhishtira tries to persuade Draupadi, “Draupadi, we have to do all we can to avoid war. You know that more than anything else I want to avoid war” (181). This arouses the anger of Draupadi. She knows that the five brothers are quite united and no one can oppose others. So she has a little chance to avenge herself with the Kauravas inspite of the fact that she is the wife of five mighty and brave Pandavas. Lord Krishna tries to pacify Draupadi: “Draupadi, I promise you I will never press for peace with dishonour. Yudhishtira and his brothers do not want that, they will never bargain for peace at that price” (199). She expresses her anger freely:

In that case, we forget the past, don't we? If they give us half the kingdom -give!
As if it is charity! We can forget everything. We can forget that they cheated us,
insulted and humiliated us, that they tried to kill us. We will forget - yes, even
more easily - what they did to me, we will never think of the hands that touched
me so cruelly, we will never remember the words they spoke to me. And all those
oaths we took that day, the promises we made yes, we will forget them too.

Bhima's blood-curdling cries, Arjuna's bare body, the muscles standing out on his arms and chest, Sahadev's arms pinioning Nakul as if to prevent him from leaping on the men who held me - no, I have forgotten one of it. 'I thought, Krishna, that an oath is an oath, a promise is a promise. I imagined these things are meant to be kept, whoever they are made to. I did not know that promises made to women mean so little, that they are so light they can be as easily blown away .(239- 240)

Thus Draupadi cannot tolerate any type of delay in starting war against the Kauravas. She wants that her five powerful husbands must take revenge upon Duryodhana and his company, only then she will be satisfied. Nirmala Prakash has rightly commented on Draupadi that "Through defiance, she shifts from femininity to feminism, discarding her mythical shell to emerge as a new woman."(11).

Kunti's recollective outpourings bring out the miserable condition of women in that period. The Kurukshetra war is over and Kunti, the mother of five Pandavas is recollecting the events that led to this devastating war. She is recollecting the past to know the root cause of this war. She thinks that Bhishma Pitamah is very much responsible for this war. He was a righteous man and he could have avoided the war by giving his right advice to the king. Rather he himself should have become the king. He should have married and produced his own children. In that case his son would have become the king and he could not become unjust like Duryodhana. Polygamy being the accepted-custom in the monarchial set-up of good old days, Kunti is said to have welcomed Madri, King Pandu's second wife, as her younger sister without any jealousy or complex. In a patriarchal society a man wants a male child. But Pandu could not produce a child due to his illness. At this juncture Kunti boldly established physical relationship with some Gods as the myth says, and gave three sons Yudhisthira, Bhima and Arjuna to her husband. The

problem faced by Kunti during the Mahabharata period, is faced by women even in modern times. A woman is never allowed to lead her independent life. Every act of a woman must be done according to the rules set by the patriarchal society. A woman can never enjoy her free will.

Pattanaik describes the pitiable condition of Duryodhana at the end of the Mahabharata war. In fact, it was Duryodhana alone who was responsible for the outbreak of the Mahabharata war. One after another, Duryodhana lost all his warriors- Guru Drona, Bhishma, Kama and others in this war and now he was all alone, possibly the last enemy of the victorious Pandavas. He was being pursued by the Pandavas. Devdutt Pattanaik has beautifully described the reaction of Duryodhana's body when he steps into the cold water to escape:

In a while, he did not feel the cold any more. It was as if his body had stopped rebelling against the cold and, instead, had accepted it. With acceptance came comfort. More comfort than he had ever had from the bodies of women he had desired and possessed. With them, there had been both a secret fear and a resentment, that they submitted to him, not out of choice, but because they had none. Now he deliberately welcomed the cold, and with that, the body that had given him so many moments of pleasure and pain, ceased to trouble him. (276)

The remarkable thing about the above-mentioned passage is that it reveals the condition of women during the Mahabharata period. The kidnapping and rape of a woman is almost the daily news of every newspaper. A woman should be faithful to her spouse. In fact, Draupadi presents a unique case of womanhood. Draupadi of the Mahabharata period may be called a virtuous lady but it is not possible in modern time's in spite of all the freedom granted to women. The traditional morality of the patriarchal society does not permit this type of liberty to a woman. Through his writings Pattanaik points out this dual policy of the society in framing the separate

code of conduct for man and woman.

There was a time when woman enjoyed the privileged and equal position in the society. Men are responsible for the secondary status of women in society but the women themselves are also responsible for their decline and deterioration. Instead of running after men and depending upon them, they should strive to carve their own identity and always try to become self-dependent. They should not allow themselves to be used like things of comfort and pleasure. The women were considered as things of pleasure and profit in ancient times. That is why, the king used to take all the wives and women of the defeated king as a reward. The women had no choice. They had to live along with the king who wins the war as his wives. A good wife must not object to her husband's actions. She should only tolerate everything with a smiling face. She should not revolt. This was the condition of women during the ancient period.

The modern age is the age of women empowerment. A number of legislations have been passed to safeguard the interests of women. The mythical image, created by men depicts these women with an angelic halo around them. The crux of the matter lies in the fact that they are depicted so because they submit to men without a whimper of protest. Sita is ideal because she silently suffered every single calamity that befell her husband. She set one of the most glorious examples by accompanying her husband to suffer the rugged travails of exile. Draupadi in all femininity agreed to accept all the five Pandavas as her husband's despite her knowledge of the truth that it was Arjuna, who successfully competed to win her hand. Kunti is hailed for not protesting against Pandu's overwhelming love for Madri as also for being a mute spectator to the Kaurava's insatiable appetite for tyranny unleashed against Pandavas. Tolerance, lack of protest, faithfulness and subjugation are the characteristics that find loud exhortations in social life. Conformation to these ideals symbolises nobility, harmony, music, perfection and truth whereas

slight deviation or defiance attaches the label of bad or even evil to a woman. Undoubtedly, tolerance, love, kindness and faithfulness are widely acknowledged traits of female nature, but self-assertion is viewed as contrary to these values. Pattanaik highlights the protesting and defiant aspects of their character. The contexts, figures and situations are mythological but the responses and reactions of her protagonists are akin to those of contemporary women. The characters are portrayed as reactionary. Thus the novelist reinterprets the mythical figures of women in order to bring out the reality of the contemporary women. He deconstructs the ideal male-devised mythological models to search and create a new model for the contemporary women. In most of the traditional writings, the writer's picturises the characters as meant to be as an example for the good and bad in real life. Social consciousness makes people regulate and interpret their lives and find worth and purpose in their existence. It helps to put one in touch with sacred realities, the fundamental sources of being, power and truth.

Men and women are associated with distinctively different roles, representations, values and beliefs. A woman is perceived as a property in a patriarchal society. Men of all castes and classes have certain beliefs ideas and rules set for them. Pattanaik's works offer unique and penetrating insights into the psyche of her women characters and one cannot but notice the rich, subtle and diverse ways in which he articulates gender through his works. In this attempt, he goes beyond all conventional literature of the traditional Indian society to create an ethos where his protagonists defy gender injustice in the Indian society.

Pattanaik's works throw light on the frustrations, conflicts and contradictions encountered by the female protagonists holding a matchless mirror to the process of the slowly emerging empowered women, articulating their growing awareness and ability for appraising and revising the concept of personal identity. While revealing the women's struggle to secure self-respect and

self-identity through his protagonists, he subtly unravels the multiple levels of oppression. Women's sexuality is seen as potentially extremely destructive force in front of which the mightiest of men are rendered helpless. The women are divided into two classes, the utterly destructive because of their unbridled sexuality and the chaste wives and the mothers. Within this polarity lie the ambiguities of levirate, polyandry and a woman's freedom to take the initiative in approaching a man. *The Mahabharata* explores such aspects in an interesting manner. On one hand it is absolutely legitimate to forcibly abduct a woman for marriage but on the other a woman has the freedom to reject a suitor at her swayamvara in spite of being bound by conditions laid down by her male relatives as Karna is by Draupadi.

The virtuous women were the mothers of the universe and highly blessed. They uphold the earth with all its waters and forests and so needed to be protected and cherished. According to puranas and vedas, the virtuousness of women lies in the idea of chastity and virtue was conjoined with the subordination and regulation of the sexuality of women by men. Kunti, the daughter of Shurasena was given away by him to his dear friend and cousin Kuntibhoja, who was childless. It was customary in those times for heirless kings to invite Brahmins to their house to seek their favour and blessings for sons. Kunti was appointed by her adoptive father Kuntibhoja to serve Durvasa Rishi, who pleased by her conduct, bestowed on her a mantra that would enable her to call upon any man or God that she might desire. Curious, to test the boon, she called upon Surya, who begot her the son Karna whom she abandoned as she was not married at that time.

After Arjuna won Draupadi in the swayamvara, the five brothers took her to Kunti who inadvertently said that they should share equally whatever they had brought. She realised her blunder when she saw Draupadi. Then the question arose as to how to fulfill Kunti's words and

also ensure the virtue of Draupadi. The problem was referred to Yudhishtira who was the embodiment of dharma. At first, he pronounced with great impartiality that since Arjuna had won Draupadi he should marry her. However Arjuna could not marry before his elder brothers, Yudhishtira and Bhima. Thus it was decided that Draupadi will be their common wife. Later, after the marriage Narada advises the Pandavas to work out rules of cohabitation with Draupadi as otherwise it lead to the conflict. Draupadi's silence on as important an issue as her marriage is strange and out of character. The position of a chaste wife was of primary importance and no family could come into existence without her. Her primary duty was dependence upon and obedient service to the husband. Since marriage took place in front of the holy fire, the husband was the wife's highest duty and whole being was to be devoted to pleasing him.

The duties are expounded over again and again in the epic, Parvati lays down the code of conduct for her at the behest of Mahadeva who assures her that it would become universal law since she formed half the part of his body. Ironically Draupadi saves the Pandavas in a situation instead being protected by them. When Dhritrastra grants Draupadi three boons, She asks nothing for herself. With the first she asks for Yudhishtira's freedom and with the second that of the others as she feels that once her husbands are free and armed, the rest can be retrieved. She thus saves the Pandavas from degradation winning even Karna's admiration. "No woman, he says, has done before what Draupadi has accomplished" (156). Draupadi also discourses upon the duties of a wife, after the second game of dice, When the Pandavas are living in exile in the forests, they are visited by Krishna and Sathyabama. Sathyabama and Draupadi meet as long standing friends and sathyabama half in jest inquires of her how she manages the five pandavas to make them all so obedient to her and soliticious of her welfare. Draupadi speaks of great discipline, she says that she controlled all vanity, desire, and wrath and serves them all together

with their wives without jealousy with great devotion and without any sense of degradation.

Draupadi after the evil war, lost her sons and drenched with anger voice and says:

She does not disregard god or dharma, every conscious creature in the world must act. Lives of living beings were shaped by the acts of former existences and hence they were different from each other. Birds and beasts acted untaught by anyone, but life without action was impossible even for them. Man differs from other creatures, she says as he alone is capable of conscious action. Only those who believe in the efficacy of their actions are laudable, those who believe in the destiny or chance are worst and destroyed soon. Success in the world depends on acting according to time and circumstances. (178)

The world of epics sees women caught in power structures, both in private and public spheres. They can attain a voice in this world through their status as wives and mothers acting through their husbands and sons. They became a force to be reckoned with through their own intelligence, acumen and endeavour. Devdutt Pattanaik reinterprets the mythical figures of women in order to bring out the reality of the contemporary women. He deconstructs the ideal male-devised mythological models to search and create a new model for the contemporary women. Using myths and human experience, Pattanaik weaves an impressive narrative exploring the women in these eternal epics through his retelling.

Chapter - 3

The Wild and the Urban: Nature as Sanctuary

The biodiversity of the earth makes up the ecosystems. It is a community of living things that work together. The term biodiversity means the different types of life forms which includes the terrestrial, aquatic and ecological composites of which they are a part. The relationship between humanity and nature and its ecological balance can be deduced from the flora, fauna and water sources of a particular period. Ecocriticism is a critical discipline which is distinct amongst modern literary theory and cultural theories. It studies the connection between nature and literature. It explores the relationship between the environment and literature. The human being is an element of nature. Literature and art influence human life. Human life also influences art and literature. Ecocriticism analyses the relationship between man and nature through literature. It identifies the roots of the problem of ecological crisis in society and is also connected with social and economic justice.

The loss of ecology has irreversible, inter-generational consequences. The protection of air, water, soil health, and diversity of life ought to be primary concerns. Quality of natural environment determines the standard of human life. Cultural survival of individuals depends upon integrated environmental practices. Imagination and creative thinking are powerful forces that establish the understanding of nature. The great environment historian Donald Worster in his

work, *Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* suggested that, “We are facing a global crisis today, not because of the function of ecosystems but rather because of the way our moral system works, to overcome this crisis, we must understand these ethical systems and use that understanding to reform them” (19).

Forests are the most striking feature of the land surface. During the ancient age, there were dense forests, which abounded in wild life. According to Pattanaik’s *Ramayana*, natural vegetation can be classified into forests and grasses. The diversity of Indian climate must have been responsible for the growth of different types of trees and grasses all over the country. Ram takes Sita and Lakshman along with him to endure, “The fourteen years of summer without a fly whisk, fourteen years of winter without a quilt and fourteen years of rain without parasols” (82). The royals turned hermits were dressed in bark, carrying nothing but weapons, a sword, a spear, an axe, a bow and a quiver full of arrows.

In the Bengali version, Ram wears the sodden strips of the fibrous inner bark trees and plants such as the banyan and the banana which are beaten into sheets to make cloth of bark. Ram mats his hair using the juice of the banyan tree. Ram is often shown wearing clothes made of leaves and he also wraps animal hide around his body which are the clothes of mendicants. While crossing the banks of river Ganga, Ram was stopped by the king of fisher folk, Guha. He asked Ram whether they are going for an excursion to the forest, Ram replied yes and added that it is for fourteen years. Ram also explains “A forest is defined as a place where we cannot even see the lights of lamps of human settlement” (88). Guha refused his point of view and adds that humans aren’t meant to live like that, especially prince and princesses. Guha offers them food but Ram refuses that and says, “No cooked food for a hermit. Just what we pluck from trees or pull out from the ground” (88). Ram realised travelling through forests in the company of his

brother was quite different as he was travelling as a hermit. In the Chitrakut forest, amidst the uneven ground strewn with sharp stones and thick, prickly bushes, snakes and scorpions, finding their own food and water, sleeping on the ground, under trees or the open sky and being constantly wary of predators, the animals of the forest was a new experience. After leaving Chitrakut, they reached the Dandaka forest, known as rakshas forest.

The cultural struggles between the men and women for supremacy and the natural affinity of women towards nature especially as it exists in an unspoiled forest setting is evident in the character of Sita. The plant symbolism in Sita's personality and the longing of Sita for life in the forest is indicative of not just the paradisiacal view of life in the forest, but it represents the urge of primeval feminine energy (Shakthi) to experience the free-spirited life. Men and women perceive nature differently: on one hand, women view nature-forest as "all-giving" and something to be nurtured. On the other hand, men view nature- forest as "wild" and something to be controlled and tamed. The birth of Sita indicates two aspects, her closeness to the spontaneous life and her affinity to nature. Indeed, this is a secret birth and never known to occur in the human world other than the plant world and therefore Sita is considered a treasure and pride. It represents two factors here: the spontaneous birth and the second, the process of cultivation; an effort of civilisation. It is subject to understanding the ways of culture, similar to nature, benefitting humanity in the process.

In the Dandaka forest, there are no boundaries, no rules. The land was named as Janasthan, ruled by one Danda. While out hunting one day, Danda came upon a beautiful woman called Arjuna and forced himself upon her. She ran crying to her father, a rishi by the name of Shukra. "A land where boundaries are not respected is no different from a jungle" (103). After the curse from the Rishi, this land become the most dreadful forest. Pattanaik says to respect the

boundaries is the hallmark of humanity, an indicator of *Dharma* (104). Animals that do not have imagination do not have the wherewithal to create boundaries or violate them. When Sita meets Shanta, Ram's elder sister, she advises her on how to save herself from the desires, as she was a young woman. She says "It is as if your stepping into the forest has caused it to bloom, you are truly the daughter of the earth" (105). Sita narrates the story to Ram, and he says "The strength to survive these fourteen years in the forest is being true to both mind and body" (108). Pattanaik interprets that if people see chastity as an obligation, it will be tough. The young prince Atri says to Ram, "Do not punish yourself if you waver, humans judge, nature does not" (108). If people acknowledge the desires and reflect them, then it will not be tough.

In Indra's NandhaVana, there were Kalpataru trees under which all desires are fulfilled. It is believed that Indra is a state of human mind that craves a life of pleasure and power. As Ram, Sita and Lakshman travel south, they see a vast plateau garlanded with hills. A sage told them that once mountains had wings and they travelled in the sky like birds, but their movements created so much noise that the Rishis called upon the Devas and asked that their wings be cut. So they fell to the ground and never moved again. After they reached Agastya's ashrama they found the tiger playing with sheep and goats as Mount Kailas described, "Where there is no hunger, hence neither predator nor prey. The predator seeks food. The prey seeks protection" (112). Pattanaik observes that predator seeks food and prey seeks protection, where Lord Shiva's son the plump and elephant headed Ganesha feeds the hungry predator, Shiva's other son Karthikeya defends the frightened prey.

After years pass, Sita and the sons of Dhasaratha cross the land Jambudvipa, which is shaped like the wood- apple jambul. They take shelter under trees and in caves, often near waterbodies. As hermits, it is important to keep moving and not stay in one place for long, except

during the rainy season when the waters flooded the earth and travel was dangerous. Sita spends much time in observing trees, butterflies and insects. She discovers how to collect honey without upsetting the bees and milk from tigresses that had finished feeding their cubs. She understands the migratory pattern of birds and fishes. She learns to communicate with bears and wolves and vultures. Ram says that “In nature, to get you have to give. There is no charity. There is no exploitation, neither selfishness nor selflessness. One grows by helping others grow.”(115). Plants and animals just live in contentment while humans need to judge and compare to feel good about themselves.

In summers Ram and Sita prefer staying next to the pond. They build huts using grass and leaves, straw and sticks only for Sita. The brothers grow used to living outdoors, sleeping under the shade of trees, enjoying the dappled sunlight of the afternoons. They hunt tigers and deers, collecting their skin and horns as trophies and used them as mats to sit on and shawls to cover themselves. The horns are used to make weapons. Ram says “We are kings, warriors and hunters. This is what we do, that is how we ensure our skills remain intact, this is a jungle, not a garden” (121). There is danger lurking in every corner, so one should protect themselves with all kind of awareness. During the later days, Sita gets the desire for the golden deer named Maricha, which leads to a turning point in her life ushering in its inevitable consequences. Ravan's abduction of Sita turns the life of the brothers inside out.

At every stage of Sita's life, there are strong connections with nature that are weaved and preserved. Sita is shown waiting for her beloved husband under the Ashoka tree in Lanka. The Ashoka tree is a short tree with mango like leaves and bright bunches of red- orange flowers. Sita had seen this plant in her father's house and in Ayodhya. They are dedicated to Kama, the God of love. When the winter is waning, women are asked to embrace this tree. The gardeners

believed it made the trees burst into bloom faster thereby heralding spring. The tree offers solace and strength to Sita as she battles precarious circumstances during her days kept in confinement.

The birth of kush is associated with Kush grass. Sita compares her two sons with the trees, where she says” All trees in the forest are unique and all trees are valid” (292). The growing fascination towards building cities, transforming nation as a mere territory and a landmark is the result of being possessed with the desire to claim ownership of the land and thereby of nature. Pattanaik indicates that all these can be destructive through his writings. He proposes the continued existence of the uncultivated wild which he presents as the source of knowledge, power, and good health. The true essence of nature is removed through the artificial mediation like cultivating, taming and possessing, whereas the self-propagated, self-willed, undominated wild is the domain of purifying, strengthening, and enlightening the path of civilisation.

The human path of development and civilisation can be suicidal if there is total transformation and abandonment of the wild. Focusing on the wild and the urban settings of the *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, Shyam comes up with the discovery of the author’s use of apocalyptic metaphor to signal how the cultivating, taming, and possessing nature bring humans to their destructive end. The use of the religious rhetoric to visualise the indispensability of the wild also is highlighted for the urban existence. In Pattanaik’s *Ramayana*, the wild has been projected as an essential and indispensable entity for the continued existence of the urban. On the other hand, the struggle for transforming, commodifying, and dominating the wild nature has been presented as harmful and suicidal for humans themselves. Building and expanding territories, possessing and laying claim over the cultivated land becomes the cause of conflict and wars. Thus, Pattanaik presents these human struggles for laying claim over land as

suicidal. Land should be left uncultivated, self-grown, and wild. Cultivating and taming of land and domesticating animals and birds is making them weak and consequently the entire ecosystem is affected. Ecopsychologists attribute great significance to life in wilderness as they believe that wilderness can contribute positively to the development of the human psyche and thus enable human beings to lead meaningful lives. Ecopsychologist Chellis Glendenning in her essay "Technology, Trauma and The Wild", elaborates:

Nature- based people lived every day of their lives in the wilderness. We are not only beginning to grasp how such a life served the inherent expectations of human psyche for development to full maturation and health. In nature- based people who today maintain some vestiges of their relationship to the Earth and their Earth-based cultures, we can discern a decided sense of ease with daily life, a marked sense of self and dignity, a wisdom that most of them admire only from afar, and lack of addiction and abuse that have become systematic in civilisation”(99).

Pattanaik’s epic characters living in the undominated and uncultivated areas, being immortal or having supernatural powers suggests that the wild, uncultivated land, plants and the creatures, and the dwellers of the wild have much more strength and healing and immunity. Hence, in the *Ramayana*, he suggests that it is necessary for the humans to learn from the wild nature which offers a variety of inspirational lessons and purifies the body and mind. It is in the wilderness that the development of the full potential of all beings is possible. This belief rejects the western notion of wild as barbarous, uncivilised, and useless.

The wild is the source of life and knowledge. It is the symbol of freedom, equality, and harmony for all lives on the planet. The wild is the true nature and life in the wild makes the

inhabitants, even humans to unite with nature. Vanucci says that man is inseparable from his environment and “He is not distinct from it but imbued in it” (Quoted in *Sivaramakrishnan* 308). Clare Palmer wonders how far humans are considered as “a part of rather than apart from nature” (28). The urban, the human culture and civilisation which is maximally represented through cities, is on the other hand, an exclusively anthropocentric construction of human rationality. Cities on the surface level are the indicators of human development, however, Pattanaik presents these very entities as the cause and site of conflict and war and the activities of possessing and laying claim over them as suicidal as shown through the characters of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Thus for the continued and sustainable existence of humankind in the planet and for the longevity of the human species, the epics highlight that wilderness is essential and indispensable. Going hand in hand with this line of thought that wild is the real human root and urbaneness and industrial civilization is the cause of human destruction, there is focus on the life of the Rakshasas, Pandavas and the Kauravas and the lives of long-living saints and ascetics in these books.

The forest belongs to no one. Without human intervention, it will stay as a jungle, a place of fear of hostility, not hospitality. It is fit for survival of the fittest and without Tapasya and Yagna there will be no civilisation. Different seeds nurtured in different fields by different farmers produce different crops indeed. As a world species, every relationship is introduced and nurtured through affection. If not, then it constitutes Adharma, "Dharma is about the exchange, about giving and receiving" (41). The wild is an indispensable part of humanity, but not something ferocious, useless or unwanted. Although the wild is depicted as uncivilised and ferocious in the discourses of cultural supremacy, it has also been found as decaying and dying. In the study of the decadence theme in the twentieth century American literature, Rebati Prasad

Neupane shares a similar view that even in the advanced material urban society, “the material happiness based on better wages, newer goods, and wider stock distribution did not satisfy all people” (205). On the basis of his analysis of the characters untimely and unexpected death, decadence, and fall in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novels, Neupane draws a conclusion that the material urbanity is merely superficial. For the present day humans, only what they have so far developed, not the natural, is valuable and essential.

The wild has been as something inessential like the inessential woman for a man as Simon de Beauvoir views, “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, and she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the absolute she is the other” (14). In the same way, the uncultivated and uninhabited wild is something inessential for humans. Humans think of what they have developed and what they cultivate as valuable and essential. Without the presence of the wild nature, the civilised human culture cannot exist for long because in Henry David Thoreau’s Quotations, he says “Wildeness is the preservation of the World” (23). Attempts to redefine the term “wild” and Pattanaik’s rendition of the epics come as a warning against the suicidal impulse of human beings who desire to possess land and eventually all of nature to the detriment of sustainability of the planet.

In the forest there are no boundaries and no rules, humans create boundaries and human violate them as well. To respect boundaries is the hallmark of humanity, an indicator of dharma. Animals do not have the wherewithal to create boundaries or violate them and it makes them innocent. Everywhere around the forest, there is sound of mating calls of birds, snakes, frogs, deer and tigers and the smell of flowers calling out by bees and butterflies. In Pattanaik’s novel *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, Sita’s view of the forest is positive understanding

and indicates a feminine affinity with forest. Sita sees only the beauty in the forest:

The forest is giving, nourishing and all-embracing.
 The earth will yield me roots, these will I eat,
 and woodland fruits, and as with thee I wander there,
 I will not bring thee grief or care. I long, when thou,
 wise lord art nigh, all fearless, with a delighted eye.
 To gaze upon the rocky hill, the lake, the fountain
 And the hill: To sport with thee, my limbs to cool,
 in some pure lily- covered pool, while the white swans
 mallard's swings are splashing in the water- springs. (115)

Her affinity with nature is clear. Her insistence on following Rama into the forest does not just seem only like an urge of a dutiful wife but it is also someone longing for a life in a forest filled with fruit-bearing trees, lakes and fountains where she can splash the water and enjoy looking at the flowers and birds while sporting with Rama. It shows her feminine urge to be part of nature. As Shakti, she longs to live as one with nature. Henry David Thoreau in the periodical *The Atlantic* through his famous essay "Walking" expresses his anxiety of not finding such creative works which tell us what he wants in the following lines:

I do not know where to find in any literature, ancient or modern, any account which contents me of that Nature with which even I am acquainted you will perceive that I demand something which no Augustan nor Elizabethan age, which no culture, in short, can give. Mythology comes nearer to it than anything. (24)

However, the characters living in harmony with nature in the wild are victorious and immortal. In the course of the development of culture and civilisation, the human beings have

forgotten their real roots. In the name of civilisation and development, they have trodden the path of destruction of nature and started calling everything natural in a much negativised vein mainly from a human standpoint. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines wild as “uncontrolled, violent or extreme” (34). Hence, the perception of the wild has been as something uncontrolled, uncultivated, uninhabited, untamed, or even violent. It is based upon the human notion of culture. The meaning of the wild established in human mind is that of a land not used to grow crops as if growing crops is the only use of land. It denotes something not quite useful for the human beings, something that should be controlled, cultivated, or made less dangerous and mild to facilitate human use. So, the perception of the wild is designed as something different and away from the human culture and without human control.

Wild is something which lacks discipline or control which in turn is a human construction. It is also something which has no sense or accuracy for the existing cultural human perception. The noun “wild” is also a natural environment that is not controlled by people and the wilderness constitutes the areas of a country far from town or cities, where few people live. Hence a remote and uncontrolled place, person, quality is associated with being wild. To bring within human boundary, then, the wild should be controlled, domesticated, cultivated, and tamed. Since the wild is something where plants or animals live or grow independently of people, it is uncultivated. Hariprasad Pokhrel says, “When we understand the wild forests as uncivilised, barbarous, ferocious, and uncultivated, it is the Western attitude of the wild. But for the East, the wild forests are the most revered places. It is in the wild that the highest form of civilisation developed in the East” (45). For Pokhrel, the society imagined through the Vedas and Puranas of the Vedic and the post Vedic periods are the highest forms of civilisation and the texts are supposed to be composed by the Rishis dwelling in the forests.

As Pattanaik says the forests are the sources of knowledge and schooling but not something barbarous or uncivilised. He adds, whatever knowledge the scholars gained in the forests under the trees with the Gurus were applied in the human habitats. Pattanaik's epic characters gain power, skill, and strength in the forests and come for a fight in the city. It provides a different view of the wild regarding various components thus of animals as free agents, each with its own endowments, living with natural systems. In the article "The Practice of the Wild", Gary Snyder says about the wilderness as:

Of plants self-propagating, self-maintaining, flourishing in accord with innate qualities. Of land a place where the original and potential vegetation and fauna are intact and in full interaction and the landforms is entirely the result of nonhuman forces. Of food crops supplies food made available and sustainable by the natural excess and exuberance of wild plants in their growth and in the production of quantities of fruits or seeds. (34)

Allen Thompson in his book *Responsibility for the End of Nature* points out that "Wild nature is not by definition the non-human. Rather it is the whole world, including humans" (86). It is inclusive, providing to all without any kind of discrimination or favour. The wild is not the nature which is not untouched by humans, but it is also not the nature which is dominated, cultivated, and transformed by humans. It is the nature where all creatures live on the principle of subsistence without exploiting and without being exploited. The wild is not the nature which is driven by human's desires but it is the nature which is inhabited by the needs of its true inhabitants. Forests, wilderness areas, deserts, isolated places are where there is very little human population and they are not under human domination and exploitation. Humans live where they have cultivated the land, where they have built houses, farms, or cities and centres.

They avoid living in the wilderness because it is uncultivated and uninhabitable. The wild is uninhabitable because humans have been used to living in entirely artificial housings. These cultivated foods and artificial housings have become perceptible only after humans started living in controlled, artificial, confined human community away from the wild. Had it not been for their physical strength, discipline and mental fortitude, it would have been impossible for the characters Pandavas to sustain their lives in the forests for so long years. Neither would it have been possible for Ram, Lakshman, and Sita to spend their lives in the forests either. Rather, what uncultivated wild gives, yields, is truly the basics of necessity for the requirements of the good health and longevity of the human beings.

The characters spending a significant period of their lives in the wild come out to be stronger, more prosperous, and more successful in the *Ramayana and Mahabharata*. In both the works, the author uses the rhetorical strategy of creating God and miracles. These miraculous events and achievements are either performed by those who are in close proximity with the wild, or by those who spend a significant period of their lives in the wild. No hospitals can treat humans better than the wild, no universities can educate humans better than the wild, and no cultivation can feed humans better than the wild. The wild, thus brought out from the human stand point, undermines the freedom and spontaneity. The cultural construction and reinforcement of the wild is manifest in the media discourses like the news creating the images of the wild as only violent, fierce, and destructive without addressing the real cause of their revenge motives. The article “Elephant Kills Elderly Woman in Sunsari” interprets the elephant protest from a cultural human standpoint. The wild elephants have destroyed the cultivated crops not the natural fruit trees. They have destroyed the artificial houses not the natural caves. G. A. Bradshaw points out, “Elephants have trespassed against physical and psychological boundaries

and have flouted human privilege by damaging houses, consuming crops, and showing a commitment to kill, behaviours legitimate only in human circles” (42). Often wilderness is presented as a fierce negative power totally negating the relativity of human activities of prohibiting the wild creatures of their natural habitats and food.

William Rueckart in his book *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* says, “Culture, one of our great achievements wherever we have gone– has often fed like a great predator and parasite upon nature” (119). The wild, however, is equal to all whether it is the human being or the other beings living together in the same place. Walt Whitman observes in his work *A Song of the Rolling Earth*, “The earth does not argue, is not pathetic, has no arrangements, does not scream, haste, persuade, threaten, promise, makes no discrimination, has no conceivable failures, closes nothing, refuses nothing, shuts none out, of all the powers, objects, states, it notifies, shuts none out”(31-36). There is exclusion based on nationality, ideology, caste, richness, membership, ownership, and overall man-built cultures but there is no such inclusion or exclusion in the wild. The wild is indiscriminately giving, inclusive, and non-resistant which gives freedom to all. Henry David Thoreau puts it short and clear: “In short, all good things are wild and free” (24). The forest is one of the concrete examples of the wild which guarantees freedom for all its inhabitants without any bias. There is freedom for all to move without visas, passports, or identity cards. Only in the wilderness, the people can reaffirm the intimate organic relationship with the intricate web of nature. William Cronon explains the significance of wilderness thus:

Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the

ultimate landscape of authenticity. Combining the sacred grandeur of the sublime with the primitive simplicity of the frontier, it is the place where we can see the world as it really is and so we know ourselves as we really are-or ought to be.(16)

The people with cultural norms are confined, imprisoned, and butchered within certain ideology, discourse, boundary and territory.

Basing the idea of the wild as uncultivated and the urban as cultivated and civilised, Pattanaik explores the fallen predicament of the city-dwellers and the longevity of the wilderness dwellers as in the *Mahabharata, Ramayana and Shyam*. After losing everything in the game of dice with their cousins, the Pandavas have to go for a *vanavasa*, in exile for twelve years and one more year in *Ajnatavasa*, in disguise. They are happy thinking that they are returning to their real roots. The Pandavas, who were born in the forest, grew in the forest and who were almost destroyed in the luxury of the city are now excited to live in harmony with wilderness. The brothers may have even felt the wilderness would do them good. They had grown soft with all the luxury they lived with in Indraprastha. They had been raised in a jungle, and part of them always longed for freedom of the wilds. They were unafraid, and quite unattached to comfort or wealth.

The Pandavas have already spent their lives in the wild forests and the nostalgia and reverence for the wild both are apparent in their attitude towards the wild and the forest life. Although they temporarily live in the palace, their real essence is the wildlife. The knowledge and power they get in the forest has always been the real life-force for them and hence the jungle the part of them. Thus even the city-dwellers especially the Kauravas who take this twelve years exile as a great curse, really lack the benefits of the wild and thus become the losers later. But the curse of twelve years exile turns out to be a boon for the Pandavas. The exile is not a curse but a

blessing for the Pandavas. The strength they have lost during their city life, during their dependence on the cultivated land and mind is regained in the wild forests. Here they do not have to stagnate inside the four walls, nor do they have to eat or drink artificiality. “There was an immense banyan tree growing at the water’s edge, with a hundred aerial roots, each one thick as a small trunk, spreading down from great branches. It was a copse by itself, and they decided to spend the night under it” (156). The king and the princes who used to live in the palaces start living in the wild forests happily.

The confined boundary of the city has made its dwellers forget their knowledge of the real human food, the abundance and the vast unlimited potentiality of the uncultivated wild. To make the Pandavas realise the greatness of the past, there are the *brahmanas* the priests who regale them with legends of times when the world was full of miracles, its heroes magnificent, its women ineffable, its battles of mythic times when the Gods came freely among men, when there was a lot of heaven on earth. The next day, they hardly missed palace life. Their bodies and spirits grew accustomed to the freedom of nature. When Pattanaik puts these words in the narration, it is quite similar to John Hannigan’s concept of *Arcadian discourse* in which:

Arcadian nature is constructed as something external to human society, or at least removed from everyday life in the city. The pure nature is best symbolised with photos of primordial wilderness settings which stands in counterpoint to the urban industrial society and to the social and all of the environmental ills attached to it.

(39)

After staying at the shelter of the banyan tree, the Pandavas leave the place, move freely crossing the Yamuna River and reach another river Saraswati, where they see “a lush jungle that seemed to call out to them, its presence was so tranquil, deeply inviting” (158). Arjuna, the third

eldest of the Pandava brothers, says, “It is the Kamyakavana,” and Yudhistira adds, “I have heard many Rishis live in this forest” (159). The Pandava’s past knowledge about the wild forest that it has been the habitat of many Rishis brings to light the significance of the wild. Though the Pandavas got a bit disappointed at losing everything during the conspiracy that was the game of dice, “those princes of destiny began living in the Kamyakavana. Soon enough, the jungle became familiar, its primeval spaces, its wild denizens, and the Rishis who lived here in tapasya, praying for the world” (161).

The wilderness makes the Pandavas aware of their holistic selves, whereas, on the other hand, the city-dwellers like Dhritarastra are “suffering” (164). “He hardly slept, and when he did terrible nightmares ravaged him” (164). After the Pandavas have started living in the forest, their cousin Duryodhana is no less anxious that the former will return and claim for their part of the kingdom. He is worried that the treachery he has done together with his uncle Shakuni will be exposed and so the eldest of the Kauravas plan to kill the Pandavas. Karna, the essential warrior, says:

Let us take an army to the forest and finish them off. It will be as easy as killing children, and it will end the division in the Kuru family: only one branch will remain! Duryodhana’s eyes shone. And when earth has drunk my cousins’ blood, I will finally have peace. The nightmare, which began when Pandu’s sons first arrive in Hastinapur, will be over. They were born in the jungle, let us kill them there. (164)

The unsettled, uncivilised, and faraway place from human settlements being stronger implicitly suggests that they get strength from the wild. Duryodhana and his brothers stop their intention to secretly attack the Pandava brothers in the forests. The Kauravas postpone their plan to attack the

Pandavas secretly for a while. But, the Pandavas go deep inside the forest away from human settlement to remain amidst the real and undisturbed wild as per Yudhishtira's remarks "The terms of our exile are that we spend twelve years in a remote and inaccessible place, far from the habitations of men. This vana hardly fulfils those conditions. My own inclination is to find a jungle where rishis live, where we can pass our exile profitably" (165). Thus, they go deeper inside to Dwaitavan, deeper from this Kamyaka vana.

This new forest, Dwaitavan, reminds the brothers of their childhood which they have spent with their parents in the forest. The memory vividly strengthens their sense of freedom and stress-free life in the forests. Yudhishtira's says "This was a different kind of forest, lighter, full of open spaces. It was more a vast and untamed garden than a jungle. The trees, too, were sturdier and grew further apart than those in the Kamyaka, and their branches were homes for koyal, chakravaka and peacock" (165). In their midst, the Pandavas begin living in an asrama of their own, which they build beside a lake on which water birds swarmed, flown here from unknown ends of the earth. These were blissful days for Yudhistira. The sylvan Dwaitavan was ideally suited to his ascetic nature, "It seemed the zephyrs that blew velvet triples across the lake, and ruffled the bird's bright plumage, also blew velvet balm into the eldest Pandava's spirit. They brought him the distant peace of the mountains, in the lap of which he and his brothers had once been carefree boys (167-168)". Pattanaik says, "You have stayed long enough in the Dwaitavana, this place has grown stale on you. It fills your spirits with melancholy; it fills Draupadi with sadness. The vapours of the lake have this effect. Go back to the Kamyaka now" (171). In their forest life, these Pandava brothers and their wife move to different forests with an unrelenting dilemma and ambivalence in them which is manifested in their conversations and psychological moods. The Pandavas move from one forest to another, one mountain to another

and cross one river after another. The Pandavas' journey in the uncultivated and uninhabited land now takes two directions. Arjuna, the third eldest among the five brothers, goes towards the mountains and the rest of all go for a pilgrimage.

Humans have developed many things for their well-being, for example, medicines and hospitals as modern establishments to treat ailments. But they also suffer from a host of ailments. On the contrary, the beings living in the wild do not have any hospitals or artificial medicines, but are far healthier in the hospital enjoying the medicine of nature. This realisation of other than human agency that nurtures and sustains becomes possible in the wild. A monkey having far more strength than a human indicates the vision of divine intelligence. In the wild, Bheema realises that a monkey has a lot of power over him. This monkey asks Bheema to "sit down and eat some fruit" (175). The monkey who reveals himself to be Lord Hanuman from Rama's time, performs many miracles in front of Bheema, but what he eats and makes Bheema to eat are only fruits. He uncurls his arm and pushes out an amazing heap of fresh fruit, pear and plum, peach and apple, offering them to the Pandava. "My advice to you, young Kshatriya, is that you sit down and eat a few fruit with me, and then turn back wherever you came from"(176). These fruits which Hanuman offers Bheema are exclusively wild and uncultivated, only collected in the forests. It is this uncultivated, self-grown fruits along with the air, the soil, and the sun of the wilderness that gives strength to Hanuman and the Pandavas during their exile.

When the Pandava brothers are on their pilgrimage, rishi Markandeya tells them the tales of the past. These tales of the past draw parallels with their own lives. When Krishna comes to them as a messenger, the answer that was sent to him was that they would not give us enough land to set on the point of a needle. It is so arrogant of humans to give and take the land, considering it as a property to be owned by humans. If these fighting characters had not thought

of the land as ours or theirs, then there would not have been such a deadly battle. This concept of ownership of land comes after who has cultivated and tilled the land and laid claim over it as theirs. But where there is no private ownership, for example, in the wild forests, or even in the unclaimed and uncultivated land in nomadic people before the period of nation and city building, there were no such fierce battles for land, ownership or private property. In this sense also, wilderness came out to be more superior to the cultivated urban. Because where there is human cultivation, there is the concept of ownership, and the concepts of intervention or interference come because of ownership and these interventions are liable for conflicts and wars. Finally, the Pandavas win the war of Kurukshetra, but Yudhishtira, who is unwilling to rule the kingdom, says to Arjuna, "Hear me clearly, Arjuna. I mean to live in the forest on fruits and roots" (197).

The human beings are the children of nature and they have to be in nature, with nature, and sustained by nature. To remove oneself from the true wilderness and to cultivate nature, lay claim over it, develop cities and empires, fight for emperorship is to invite human apocalyptic doom. The doom is unavoidable for those who are passionate about urban life like the Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. It is also devastating for those who have natural blood in them but cannot give up the avarice for cultivated, private ownership over natural land as it happens to the Pandavas. The Pandavas gain strength from the wild uncultivated nature mountains, rivers, and forests but their greed for ownership over land cannot protect them from their unavoidable devastation.

In *Shyam*, Pattanaik forecasts Krishna as Damodra (51), because his mother tied a rope around his belly and tied him to a mortar. Though a toddler he dragged the mortar behind him revealing his immense strength and like the Greek Hercules, pulled down two mighty trees. The falling of two trees is considered as bad luck in Hindu mythology as there are hidden celestial

beings alive in trees and animals. Pattanaik says the Hindu love for God (Bakthi) and the Christian love for God (Agape) shows the doctrine of equality of all forms of life. Yasoda when peering into her child's mouth was surprised to find not dirt but "the entire universe, the earth with its seven mountains, and seven rivers, the sky above the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars, the seven seas around full of water, treacle and milk".(54). This reveals that God and Nature are present in the world, and the world is present within God and Nature. Human beings continuously fear abuse, exploitation and violation due to the predatory instinct of other humans. Shyam's lore strives to restore faith and love in all forms of life. Shyam's love for cows, milk and butter is the hallmark of Krishna temples around India. Cows are the metaphor for the senses. Just as the cow grazes on grass the senses graze on sensory stimuli. "We don't use sticks to herd them anymore, nor do we need crooks to stop the calves from running away" (74). Shyam plays his flute and they follow him wherever he goes, like children to parents. Shyam is associated with cattle breeds like cow, bull, crane, horse and monkey. Dancing and sporting with bulls has been recorded as a sport right from the Indus valley civilisation. A popular activity amongst many pastoral and agricultural communities, a forerunner of what is now known in south India as Jallikattu. Shyam, who fought with Arishta, was perhaps its divine patron. Shyam is called Keshava because he kills Keshi, the horse demon. Balarama is associated with agricultural symbols such as the pestle and the plough. It makes him the God of farmers. Along with Krishna, the God of cowherds, he embodies the primary industries of human settlements. Monkeys play a key role in the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata*, Monkeys help Ram to build bridge to Lanka and Shyam often plays with monkeys and gives them butter to eat. In every epic, wild animals are perceived in different capacities. Some are worshipped, others feared. This helps human beings make sense of the impersonal wild.

Shyam saves the villages from wild animals as well as natural calamities like forest fires, making him the guardian God of ancient times. The lifting of the mountain with his hands that evokes love in the heart of the milkmaids is a symbol of his heroism and virility making him attractive. Shyam transcends social hierarchy. Shyam is ever visualised as king. He is always imagined as a cowherd and charioteer, who serves other communities. Vyasa told Shuka, “In the forest, at night, outside the village, he made bejewelled women feel so safe that they danced unsupervised by family”. (93) Women give up household chores, forget about their families and follow him to the forest in the autumn night to dance with him, imitating his movements. The forests around Vrindavana were now renamed as Madhuvana, the sweet forests, forests where there was no fear in the wilderness, just joy. The forest, wild and untamed, is a space of terror, until Shyam’s presence eliminates the fear, and makes it enjoyable.

Shyam’s encounter with the dhobi who does not talk to him respectfully reveals the urban- rural divide. In *Ramayana*, a dhobi’s gossip about Sita’s character leads to her exile from Ram’s palace. The dhobi regrets his actions but Ram refuses to punish him as a king. He is punished when Ram becomes Shyam, a common cowherd. Shyam is a combination of Varaha and Narasimha as he displays strength as well as fluidity. When a human being uses strength and cunning only for his own survival, he is no different from an animal. The tulsi plant is a symbol of bhakti. In this story, greater value is given to the metaphorical worth of a plant than to the actual value of God. The tulsi plant is a symbol of Radha. It embodies love for Shyam. In the same way the Vilva plant embodies love for Shiva. Perhaps these are remnants of old tree worship patterns are incorporated into Bhagavatism.

Shyam insists that the Pandavas spend their exile in the forest. This is not simply to keep their word but also to prepare them for kingship. It is to facilitate that the years in the forest

transform the Pandavas. They learn humility. The forest is a recurring motif in Indian scriptures. Ram goes into forest exile, Shyam's life moves from the forest to the city, and the Pandavas, who are born in the forest, return to it, first as refugees when the Kauravas burn their palace, and later as exiles. Ram who follows the rules is called Maryada Purushottam, the rule- following perfect man. Shyam who breaks the rule is called Leela Purushottam, the game- playing perfect man. A perfect man is neither one who follows rules or bends the rules of a game, he is one who upholds dharma, take care of the weak without feeding the insecurities of the mighty. The death of Shyam marks the beginning of the Kali Yuga, the final chapter of the world's cycle. The stories reveal the nomadic and rural Shyam's first encounter with a more urban ecosystem, and his eventual transformation from a rustic rake to a sophisticated statesman. Everyone views the world differently. Wars are fought because both sides believe they are right. While that is true in the animal kingdom, when animals fight over mates and territories; it is not true in the civilised world, where war comes from man's inability to give, to share and outgrow hunger and fear.

The wild is essential, a significant part of all creatures including humans and in the absence of ecological harmony practised as in the wild, the apocalyptic destiny, especially of humans, is unavoidable as that of the characters of the epic. The underlying cause, either through human wars or through disease or sickness or lack of strength and essence, or through destruction of natural state with cultivation, of the doomed destiny, is the move away from the natural state, the uncultivated land, uncultivated forests uncultured earth which all have a lot to give to the creatures including humans. Going far away from these and relying upon the laboratory products, humans are themselves bringing their quick downfall. Living in the stale, artificially stored, and decaying food stuffs of the urban places, they are inviting their early death. Depending blindly on man-made artificial treatment system like medical science, they are

making their immune system other-dependent and thus are killing their independence on the power to heal themselves. In the name of development, civilisation and progress, human beings have forgotten the real roots. Pattanaik's works delve into the retelling of the timeless epics highlighting the much-needed lessons for sustainable living. Living in conformity with Nature is the way of the civilised and this is welcomed. Going against Nature is considered unethical and disastrous. These works thus provide vast and interesting information about the power of Nature in all her amazing manifestations thus highlighting the fact that the wild is indispensable and nature is indeed a sanctuary for the human soul.

Chapter-4

Illuminating Interpretation: Retelling as an Awakening

Retelling is a notion different from translation and simple story telling in terms of its theme and encrypted tacit interpretation. While a myth is retold, it upholds the content of the mythical story along with the understanding and interpretation of a re teller. India is a land of diverse cultures and each culture has its own collection of mythical tales. Since ancient times, myths are not only translated but are retold within each of the cultures. Retelling is a reflection of change in social values over time.

Rewritings in the twentieth century, by writers have taken a fresh approach to Indian epics and its various mythical characters while challenging established norms. This has in turn inspired readers to revisit the epics. Unlike the Western tradition, where myths are considered unreal, in the Indian literary tradition, mythologies and epics have inspired writers, to illustrate the real social situations of the country. It is not only that mythical characters are evoked to illustrate reality, but even the narrative tradition of the ancient past is indispensable to contemporary works which rewrite stories of mythical characters. In the modern form, the incorporation of myths into literary works is of much relevance. A myth may be told and retold giving way to a new myth in a modern context challenging modern creativity as it seems to have become an inevitable part of Indian story-telling tradition.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Devdutt's *Ramayana* present the same stories but retain their identities different from each other while the fact is that, they, as a character, originate from the same myth but are shaped by the social values or perhaps by the reteller's own understanding of it. Retellings are also subject to deviate from the prototype and shape themselves according to an author's age, social fabric as well as his own understanding and interpretation of the myths so that they may reflect the era, the author is breathing in. The changes that occur in a retelling are natural as they are being retold and therefore, it is expected that they will not follow the exact mythical tale. Myths are subject to multiple number of interpretations and retelling fulfils this dimension.

Myths or mythology, a tale or collection of tales compiled as an epic or a *purana* have been a source of not only fascination but also inspiration for writers and readers from all over the world. Through generations, different stories in Indian mythology have been passed from generation to generation either by word of mouth or through carefully stored records of the same. The stories in Indian mythology are most effective in conveying powerful messages to the readers and influencing their personality. The intention of Indian mythological tales is to convey subtle facts, rules and laws to guide our daily lives. There are usually multiple stories explaining the same fact, occasion or festival with each version being right in its own merit. It is a result of natural evolution that the stories have passed on through generations. Across geographical differences, myths taken from the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and the *Itihasas* retain their original intent, adding local flavour in terms of language, imagery. These tales have not only created a group of avid readers but have proved to be a heritage of Indian culture and preserved it with each retelling.

A retelling becomes much more than a mere telling of an incident. In it, lies certain

images, experiences, events, that transgresses the myth and appears in contemporary arena. Devdutt Pattanaik carves out these images, experiences and events which prove to be objective correlative for an author through which he correlates the mythical incidents with the present notions, incidents and situations. This method diminishes the frontiers between past and present. The presence of personality discusses the distinctive consciousness of an author which bears some kind of relationship with the author's biological self, getting manifested as a subjective correlative of the objects, characters, images, incidents and style. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata* are retellings, told to suit the contemporary sensibilities. In the texts, the retelling of myths is observed and it is seen, that the retelling beholds the elements that are alien to mythical tales and reflects a different arena from that of the original tales.

Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana is a mythical tale, which deals with complexity of various relations between father and daughter, husband and wife and king and kingdom. Pattanaik reveals the mythical character Ram, his state of indecision, while exploring the various turmoils in his life. A work of literature also witnesses the revelations which are in fact the precise reflections of thoughts and feelings represented by the author identifiable it as his own. It could be substantiated by the remark of George Poulet in his article *Phenomenology of Reading Authors* as he says, "Indeed every word of literature is impregnated with the mind of the one who wrote it. As he makes us read it, he awakens in us the analogue of what he thought and felt. (58). Pattanaik uses an effective medium to reinvent and reclaim his sense of Indianness, a feeling which he intensifies with reclaiming the distant myth and immediate past of the nation. Pattanaik mentions in his interviews about people who approach him and comment, "You know,

what you said are things that we instinctively knew all along, but we never heard them said in quite that way”(3). The above statement says significant things about the readers and the impact of retelling over them. The retelling tells about something that existed before everyone but the author points towards it in his unique manner, according to his experience and point of view.

Rewritings in the twentieth century by writers from India and abroad, focus on various mythical characters like Draupadi, Sita, Shyam, Yudhishtir, Ravana, Kunti, Karna, Bheema and others. In fact Indian myth has created much literary and critical interest among contemporary writers. Some examples of such rewritings are Alf Hildebeitel *The Cult of Draupadi, Mythologies From Gingee to Kuruksetra* in 1988, Shivaji Savanta’s *Mrityunjaya*, and *The Death Conqueror: The Story of Karna* in 1989, Pratibha Ray’s *Yajnaseni* in 1995, Pavan K. Vasudevan M.T. Nair’s *Second Turn* in 1997, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan essay “The Story of Draupadi’s Disrobing: Meanings for Our Times” in 2001, Mahasweta Devi’s *After Kurukshetra: Three Stories* in 2005, Chitra Divakaruni’s *The Palace of illusions* in 2008, Iravati Karve’s *Yuganta* in 2008 and Amish Tripathi’s *Sita-Warrior of Mithila* in 2017.

Basically, an epic refers to a long narrative poem derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the great deeds of legendary heroes who embody the values of a particular society. Whereas myth is an ancient story, especially concerning the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts typically involving supernatural beings. However, the stories of epic and myth are told again and again serving to explain why something is the way it is. In the modern form the incorporation of myths into literary works is of much relevance and is subject to connotations and denotations. People are reluctant to defy myths because they are deeply rooted in religion and culture. As Northrope Frye observes, in his article *Myth, Fiction, and Displacement*, “Myth is a conception which runs through many areas of contemporary thought:

anthropology, comparative religion, sociology, and several others” (349).

Mythologies tend to outline an entire universe in which the Gods represent the whole of nature in humanised form, and at the same time, retelling shows in perspective, the origin of societies, the destiny of human beings in such societies, the limits of their powers, and the extension of their hopes and desires. In fact, retellings provide outlines and circumference of a universe which is narrated verbally. Over the centuries most major languages of India have rewritten *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* to fit their regional ethos and available metrical repertoire. Even to the modern day novelists the epics and their retelling depict global influences and continue to be a creative challenge. Thus the epics in India do not belong to the past alone—they are also part of the contemporary consciousness. Pattanaik shows how human imagination is related to a motive by assigning symbolic meaning to rituals. He stresses on the importance of myth in making religion appealing not merely to faith or belief, but also to imagination. Hence, a writer uses myths in his writings to bring wider connotation and perspective. In the classics, myths are used in place of images to project the hidden truths. Myth can be an image, a symbol, and a metaphor. Pattanaik agrees that retelling is not translation, as no retelling by a creative storyteller is a carbon copy of the original. Pattanaik’s *Mahabharata* is not the translation of Vyasa’s *Mahabharata*, rather he has re-conceptualised it and composed a truly wonderful work. The critic, Rene Girard, in his essay “Violence and Representation in the Retelling Mythical Text” also refers to the trustworthiness of mythical representations which have real referents. He explains:

Until now we have been very careful to treat the mythical representations as purely representations, but their analysis has logically led us to the hypothesis that some of them at least must have a real referent, as the linguist would say. In order

to arrive at a truly concrete and efficient theory of the myth we must face the possibility that some of its representations are trustworthy, at least in principle.

(934)

Pattanaik uses archetypes of legendary heroes, symbols, character types and themes. His *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata* goes back and forth in time, from Krishna's life and to contemporary times, when a killer believes himself to be the Kalki avatar. The character Shyam relates to the characteristic features with human situations and sensibilities. Contemporary retellings also attempt a version of feminist revisionist mythology that aims at a strategic revisionist use of gender imagery to transform culture and subvert the heritage that women inherit. Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*, Moyna Chitrakar and Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana* explore Ramayana from Rama's abandoned queen's perspective, Sujoy Ghosh's *Ahalya* inverts the story of Sage Gautama's wife, *Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni revisits *The Mahabharata* from the perspective of Draupadi and Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* are few examples of literature that weave threads of feminism in the narration and retelling of myths.

People have started to question all the basic plots, the storylines as well as the Gods behind the stories in mythology. They constantly are in search of science and reasoning behind them. Maybe that is why authors are using epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* as their base stories in Indian fantasy fiction and giving it prime importance. The tales of old Gods and Goddesses may seem irrelevant in today's times but they have become a living source to understand the present, as a number of books by recent authors highlight. These narratives appear in numerous sagas or trilogies with the Gods and their counterparts, that is the demons, their fights and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. They also appear in multiple mediums, in

comic books and graphic novels, movies and cartoons. This proves that these tales are not yet extinct. They are been revisited again and again and retold in several ways over and over.

Pattanaik himself observes that pure myth can be retold in any language, any style and in any medium without losing its identity. It is evident that in this modern day retelling, Pattanaik very carefully captures all the interpretations and representations of *Ramayana* but with the perspective of *Sita*. There has been a lot of feminist debate going on whether *Ram* had been right while following his *dharma* and abandoning his wife *Sita*. In this light, Devdutt Pattanaik tries to untie the knot, not with a feminist perspective, but clearing out the fact, that it is not a story about good or bad, but a story depicting the good and evil in the world. "Sita watched Lakshman's nostrils flare. She felt his embarrassment and rage. She wanted to reach out and reassure him, but she restrained herself. 'You feel your *Ram* has abandoned his *Sita*, don't you?' she asked gently. 'But he has not. He cannot. He is God, he abandons no one. And I am Goddess, I cannot be abandoned by anyone (234)". Pattanaik's *Ramayana* is not a simple retelling of Valmiki's account. It is more than that, the author juxtaposes culture. He compares *Ram*, king and upholder of rules, with *Krishna*, the kingmaker who bends rules. He brings to our attention symbols and metaphors, motifs and patterns. The writing is powerful and crisp. The *Ramayana* is a tale of emotion – full of affection, loyalty, love, greed, lust and malice. Pattanaik's evocative prose brings out these emotions in all their intensity. The reader is left feeling a deep sense of empathy with the characters. Pattanaik works on the plot of the stories placing them into a linear progression of plot events with chapters arranged in thematic clusters. He also informs the readers of changes that were made throughout the centuries and prods the readers to question the characters, their actions, thoughts and behaviours. He includes different interpretations made by scholars and poets and questions their validity. Finally, he includes western interpretations of the

story. He mentions how these interpretations have been purposefully exploited in the past to justify British rule in India. He also points fingers to oppressors and politicians who use the stories to justify their campaigns.

Pattanaik's rendition records Sita's life, right from her childhood days to her final refuge inside mother Earth. It explores the character of Sita mainly through two significant metaphors that she is associated with, nature and food. He brings out Sita's association with vegetation, especially grass. Believed to be found in a furrow by King Janaka, Sita's connection to nature and fertility is established and she is called Bhumija which means the daughter of the earth. Her connection to nature is highlighted by Pattanaik during the exile, her banishment to the forest, and of course her final refuge in the arms of Mother Earth. In conjunction with nature, Pattanaik traces Sita's connection to food. Sita's depiction in this novel is mostly from the perspective of her being known as *Annapoorna*, the Goddess of food. Pattanaik traces the importance of food and its preparation in every household. While discussing the supreme place of kitchen, he says, "Indian thought, while valuing thought, also values food. Food is nourisher, healer as well as happiness provider. Thought may be God but food is the Goddess. One cannot exist without the other." (22) The author explores the well-known metaphor of Sita's kitchen, a part of many Indian folklores and shows Sita's instant connect to food the moment she steps inside her mother's kitchen. However, her connection to food in no way diminishes her intellectual powers. Pattanaik draws attention to Sita's dual roles in the kitchen as well as in her father's court:

Before long, Sita found her feet around the kitchen: peeling, cutting, churning, pickling, steaming, roasting, frying, pounding, mixing, kneading, experiencing various textures, aromas, flavours and chemistry. Her senses became familiar with the secrets of spices, and every kind of nourishment provided by the plant and

animal kingdom. (45)

Sita's father never knew of the world that was the kitchen. Sita's mother never knew the world that was the court. But Sita realised she knew both and acknowledged both are necessary for the expansion of the mind. Sita gets her feet firmly rooted to her mother's kitchen and takes her interest to her husband's home after marriage. She carries with her "the seeds of pulses and grains, vegetables and fruits, herbs and spices which would be grown in her husband's garden to remind her of home. For when a bride enters the husband's house she brings with her not just the promise of a new generation but also new food, a new culture" (61).

Pattanaik stresses on the Indian cultural scenario where it is deemed auspicious for a newlywed bride to visit the kitchen on her entering her husband's house. Sita and her sisters too are taken to the kitchen and made to customarily touch the various utensils which were being used for cooking. With this initiation, Sita's link to food starts in her new household and she carries it forward to the forest too, where she spends a large part of her life. Pattanaik traces Sita's association to food all throughout her exile. Ram, Lakshman and Sita meet Sage Agastya and his wife, Lopamudra in the forest. While the sage gives the brothers many weapons to assist them, his wife spends many hours with Sita in her kitchen garden, giving her practical wisdom on various "spices that enable digestion and heal wounds" (114). In the forest, Sita is not just a companion, but plays an active role in providing nourishment to Ram and Lakshman.

Sita's association with nature becomes manifold in the forest and she starts observing plants and animals minutely, learns how to communicate with animals, and thereby, discovers various hidden elements in nature. Through this unique bonding she is able to "Find the most succulent of fruits and berries, gets to know where the best tubers could be pulled out from the ground, found leaves that were edible and bark that was nourishing" (115). Sita, thus, turns into

the true daughter of nature during her life in the forest. Sita's image as the nourisher is explored further in her accepting risk to provide alms to Ravana in the disguise of a hermit. As the eldest daughter-in-law of the family, her link is thus established to the reputation of the family on one hand, as well as, being the nourisher on the other. A more complex association of Sita with food from the perspective of patriarchal hegemony is brought out, on hearing Hanuman's account of Ram eating Shabari's tasted berries, "I am like Shabari's berry. I belong to Ram but Ravana wants to taste me. Will Ram still accept me when I am thus contaminated?" (164).

Pattanaik's writing lends a meaningful insight into Sita's portrayal in various roles as daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, prisoner, and mother and links all these positions intricately to her association to food. Sita's link to food is further explored by Pattanaik during her exile in Lanka. In her captive's land, she holds a special position because of her supreme knowledge of the intricate details of culinary skills. Her suggestions on the proportions of spices in the food being prepared in the kitchens of Lanka made such a drastic change that *rakshasa* cooks from the kitchen started coming to the Ashoka grove to take further advice from her. Sita's expertise in the preparation of food was such that even without tasting the food, she could give her best guidance just by smelling what had been prepared. Her suggestions brought about drastic changes in the food being cooked in Lanka's kitchen and led to an environment of such festivity and contentment that the Lankan men forgot all about the war and started conversing only about food. In Valmiki's ashram, Sita trains her sons on food habits and forest culture of the animal world. The boys grow up watching their mother's culinary expertise. Sita trains her sons on basic skills like making fire and hunting for food. Pattanaik's Sita is truly the Goddess *Annapurna* who is the source of nourishment to everyone.

The Ramayana is not a single text, even multiple texts. It is a belief, a tradition, a

subjective truth, a thought materialised, ritualised and celebrated through narrations, songs, dances, sculptures, plays, paintings and puppets across hundreds of locations, over hundreds of years. Retelling has many tributaries and many branches. Each has its own essence, focusing on different plots, different characters and different aspects of the human condition each one innovatively recreating as well as contributing to the plots and themes. Pattanaik explains in his *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, “Ram-Katha, Ram –Leela, Ram- Akhyan, Ram-Charita, Ram-Kirti or Ram-Kavya venerable is its ability to uplift the spirits despite or even because of the disturbing aspects of the tale” (78).

According to Devdutt Pattanaik in his interview with ABP Majha, “The word and the meaning are both different things. When human beings receive messages, they look at the words. The words are stronger than the meaning behind it. Similarly, the Ramayana as a whole is a *deha* (body), but you have to look at its *dehi* (soul) to delve with the meaning. The words will be the same in each story, but the meaning and the soul changes every time.”(9) The stories change every time and there is nothing novel about it. He says that retelling mythology is an eternal thing, the authors are practicing the dharma they are maintaining the eternity. In the sense of self-respect, in the end when *Ram* comes to take her, she does not go with him but instead goes back to Mother Earth. The old retellings had a mystical sense, but now the authors speaking through contemporary language explore elements of logic and reasoning behind the stories which fascinates the readers.

Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, bestows the subaltern characters in the story with greater significance than many central characters. The forester, the tribal, and the women get more significance in the narrative. On one instance, Bhima admits that Draupadi knows Yudhistira better than his own brothers. The Mother is one of the most revered

characters Foresters like Ghatotkacha and Kimeeran are almost equal in strength to that of the trained princesses. A forester like Mayan possesses great knowledge in weaponry and architecture. In Vedic school, Uncle Vidura's sons do not join the Kauravas and Pandava brothers, as Vidura was Pandu's half-brother, born to a maid and hence not of royal lineage. Most of the time when the character of Karna is discussed, he is labelled as the charioteer's son, which reminds the audience of the evil hierarchies maintained by casteism that is still rooted in the Indian society. The book also refers to marriages in Indian society and highlights the practice as an alliance for power and money. "Wives become queens based on the might of their family. Wives without might are discarded" (57), contemplates Bhima after Uncle Vidura sends a messenger asking the Pandavas to attend the swayamwara in the palace of King Drupada. If one of the Pandavas gained the brides' hand, the fortune that awaited them was in the form of a very powerful ally against the Kauravas. The character or personality of the bride did not matter in front of the wealth and influence she brought from home.

Indian women for long have been surrounded with the pain and suffering of conventional social order. The image or symbolism of Sita as a devoted wife and Draupadi as a piece of property has remained enduring and it is for feminist retellings to move beyond fixed narratives and imageries. It can be clearly viewed that in *The Ramayana*, for the sake of a husband's suspicion, a woman has to go to exile, bound to give birth and bring up her sons all by herself. Even after all such difficulties, during inspections just to prove her chastity she needs another man to defend her. Likewise the epic *The Mahabharata*, is replete with instances of the exploitation of women's identity and independence wherein a woman is forced to be shared by five brothers and exchanged during gambling in the royal court.

Draupadi begins to question her prescribed place and role in the royal household and in

society. She begins by questioning her very name:

Draupadi is seen critically analysing the names that were given to her brother and to herself. The name Dhristadyumna for her brother meant ‘destroyer of enemies’ and the name Draupadi for herself merely meant ‘daughter of Drupad’. Her brother’s name succinctly brings out the mission of his life, which is to kill the incomparable Drona whereas her name, Draupadi, only gave her an identity tied to her father, King Drupad’s.(78)

Pattanaik, who explains that his work sprang from his own observations of how women were always portrayed as peripheral in epics, has been lauded for his work as a serious retelling, popular fiction with a fine feminist touch. Kumar, P. P. in his article “The fascinating world of retellings: Retellings of the Indian epics” says that,

Pattanaik’s mythology is still structured as a centre-periphery relationship, it transforms *Jaya* from another retelling of the *Mahabharata* in English to a cultural and religious compendium that can create a dense multilayered zone, connecting variant retellings to their putative main narrative, which in turn also opens up space for speculations and explorations about character motivations and symbolism by relying on a vast array of academic and popular sources. (794)

The idea of *Dharma* that emerges from this retelling, is accordingly protean in that it critiques social norms on the one hand, but also stresses the role of the individual in creating a better society on the other. Pattanaik includes more episodes from the Sanskrit as well as regional and vernacular retellings. The multiplicity of variants allows Pattanaik the flexibility and ingenuity of framing and responding to the moral dilemmas in the *Mahabharata*, positioning himself in a long line of

interpreters and mythographers. Pattanaik collates variant retellings, opening up the narrative to avenues of speculation and exploration. When Pattanaik refers to *Dharma*, he accordingly opens up the spaces to an extent to question social norms and modern man-made law, stressing on the role of the individual within the ambit of society.

In *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of The Mahabharata*, Arjuna's abduction of Subhadra is mentioned. In various retellings, Arjuna marries seven women besides Draupadi, the figure of the *navagunjara* in Oriya retellings, and Draupadi's relation with her co-wives in Tamil retellings. The story of Arjuna marrying seven women opens up space for Pattanaik to speculate as it shows a different side of the character as compared to the one that appears in the *Mahabharata*:

In Indonesia, Arjuna is said to have married seven women besides Draupadi. The most important among them were Sumbadra, sister of Krishna, who is subservient and gentle and Shikhandi, sister of Draupadi, a saucy and skilled archer, who later participates in the battle at Kuru-kshetra and is responsible for killing Bhishma. The woman who later became Duryodhana's wife was also in love with him but Arjuna felt it would be inappropriate for him to marry the woman already promised to his cousin brother, a side of Arjuna not seen in the Sanskrit Mahabharata where Arjuna gets pleasure in claiming what Duryodhana hopes will be his.(234)

Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, hints at the psychological, cultural layers of society that contribute to the rich symbolism and motivations of the characters. The Kauravas are villains in the epic only because they refuse to outgrow the animal desire to cling to territory and dominate like an alpha male. Krishna helps the Pandavas, undergoes the

transformation, but as events unfold, one realises there is a huge gap between intention and implementation. The Kauravas are villainous because they cannot outgrow their animalistic desire, as opposed to the Pandavas who have outgrown them. By framing Duryodhana's envy as animalistic desire, *Jaya* reframes his motivations as one founded in natural barbarism, and not inherent in the character itself.

Pattanaik's *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of The Bhagavata* presents the retelling of the story of Prithu. Prithu is an incomplete incarnation of Vishnu. Ram and Krishna are complete incarnations of Vishnu. Of these Pattanaik takes Krishna to be the most complete as, unlike Ram, he is constantly aware of his divinity, is linked with playfulness and aesthetic delight and comfortably embraces his feminine side. *Shyam* is a feeling within every people, and they understand the feeling. Traditionally, the feeling of Shyam was transmitted through performances by courtesans in the Mughal court. In Zee Jaipur Literature Festival, Pattanaik pointed out that, "We don't realise how retelling mythology played a critical role in creating India" (5). In *Shyam*, Pattanaik avoids superfluous words, he refuses to adhere to the majestic tales and folklore of our land about the God that Krishna is. Without questioning beliefs and sentiments, Pattanaik colours his writings on the palette of history interspersing it with the hues of mythology. The definition of *dharma* keeps changing with time. Ram's *dharma* was in his actions. For Yudhishtira, his *dharma* was identifying right from the wrong and following the correct path. Krishna taught *dharma* through love, Buddha's *dharma* is equality. Pattanaik explains the when the love for Krishna is understood, the people can get closer to him.

Krishna's story comes in fragments via Sanskrit literature, first in the *Mahabharata* that speaks of Krishna's adulthood amongst the Pandavas, then in the *Harivamsa* that speaks of his pastoral foster family, then in the *Vishnu Purana* that refers to him as Vishnu's avatar, then the

now popular *Shrimad Bhagavata Purana* that refers to the dance with milkmaids at night and the *Geet Govind* of Jayadeva that introduces us elaborately to Radha. Pattanaik illuminates the images of Krishna, “Raising his hand with a discus rotating on his index finger has become very popular amongst nationalists who prefer seeing him more as coach and instructor than a lover” (11). Krishna’s story may have been transmitted in its entirety orally for thousands of years before being put down in writing. Pattanaik explains that the *Mahabharata* reached its final textual form about two thousand years ago, *Harivamsa* around thousand seven hundred years ago, *Vishnu Purana* around thousand five hundred years ago, the final layers of the *Bhagavata Purana* came together thousand years ago, and the *Geet Govind* about eight hundred years ago.

Many retell the story of Krishna and Ram from birth to death sequentially, speaking of their descent from Vaikuntha as avatars, and their return to their heavenly abodes after accomplishment of the vision and mission of their incarnations. Ram is different from Krishna because Ram does not know he is Vishnu, while Krishna does. Ram is the seventh avatar and Krishna is the eighth in popular traditions. For Krishna devotees, Krishna is the greater avatar of Vishnu. The greatest even the complete avatar poorna-avatar, the most perfect personal manifestation saguna Brahman of the impersonal divine nirguna Brahman. So, for many devotees, Krishna’s heaven of Goloka stands higher than Vishnu’s heaven of Vaikuntha. Vaikuntha is located in the ocean of milk, but all this milk comes from the udders of cows located in Goloka. These cows voluntarily release their milk because they are so moved by the music of Krishna who, inspired by the beauty and love of Radha, plays the flute as he stands under the celestial Kadamba tree which, in Goloka, takes the form of Kalpavriksha, the divine wish-fulfilling tree. While there are many common stories of Krishna across India, Krishna is different in different parts of India, and the world.

Pattanaik captures the different retelling versions of Krishna's story across India. In Maharashtra, people connect with Krishna through the image of Vithoba of Pandharpur. Poet-saints of Maharashtra such as Eknath, Tukaram, and Gyaneshwar brought Krishna to the masses. In Rajasthan and Gujarat, Krishna is revered through Shrinathji of Nathdwara. People from Odisha connect with Krishna through the local image of Jagannath in Puri temple. In Assam, it is through the many Namghars, which was established over five hundred years ago by Shankardev. In Devdutt's *Shyam*, there are no images of Krishna. He is accessed through chanting, singing, dancing and performances. In Tamil Nadu, Krishna is rarely distinguished from Vishnu. He inspired the collective of poets known as Alvars. In Kerala, about four hundred years ago, the Sanskrit poetry anthology known as *Narayaniyum* was composed. It tells the story of the *Bhagavata Purana* in a very short form and it is popular in the Guruvayur temple. North India is completely unaware of these traditions. In South East Asian countries like Cambodia, Krishna is heroic. He wrestles and defeats demons, but there are no references to his pastoral roots. So the Krishna who became popular in South East Asia over thousand years ago is Vasudev Krishna of the *Mahabharata*, not Gopal Krishna of the *Bhagavata*. Krishna is thus very different when seen through the lens of geography, as he is when seen through the lens of history.

The *Mahabharata* is traditionally considered inauspicious because it deals with bloodshed and the break-up of a family. This is why people prefer retelling stories of Krishna's childhood and youth with his mother Yashoda and his beloved Gopikas from the *Bhagavata Purana*. The only auspicious part of the *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad Gita*, a summary of Hindu philosophy narrated by Krishna to Arjun on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Had there not been a *Bhagavad Gita*, people would not have given so much value to the latter half of Krishna's life. The *Bhagavad Gita* introduced us to bhakti yoga two thousand years ago. The *Bhagavata Purana* elaborated it in

fine detail nearly thousand years ago. The former gave an intellectual foundation to the latter's emotional approach to God that swept across India as the bhakti movement about five hundred years ago. In this period, local poets such as Meera of Rajasthan and Salabega of Odisha and Narsi Mehta of Gujarat and Vidyapati of Mithila and Tukaram of Maharashtra composed songs on Krishna, bringing him closer to the masses. In their songs, stories of the *Bhagavata Purana* blended with the philosophy of *Bhagavad Gita*.

Stories of Krishna are abound in the Buddhist and Jain traditions. In the Jain version of the epic, the battle is not between the Kauravas and Pandavas. The battle is between Krishna of Dwaraka and Jarasandha, the emperor of Magadha, in which the Pandavas support Krishna and the Kauravas support Jarasandha. It is important to note that the Jain version runs along the east-west axis of India, Jarasandha is in Magadha, in the east, and Krishna is in Dwaraka, in the West. The Buddhist Jatakas make no direct reference to Krishna, but a Krishna-like character appears in the Ghata Jatakas, where his quality as a wrestler is highlighted. When he mourns the death of his son, he is consoled by Ghata-Pandita, who is the Bodhisattva. Krishna's life in Dwaraka is something of a mystery, few stories of Krishna, the husband and householder are retold. People are familiar with his two most well-known wives, Satyabhama and Rukmini. Many of the Puranas refer to his eight senior queens, and there is also reference to over thousand junior wives he gave shelter to after the conquest of Narakasura.

Krishna has to be a good husband to maintain domestic harmony between competing wives. There are stories about how he multiplies himself to give full attention to each of his sixteen thousand wives. These are, of course, metaphors explaining at one level Krishna's ability to manage complex situations, and at another level establishing him as the divine. Some folk narratives of Krishna draw attention to his androgynous nature. Krishna's statues in Odisha bends

like a dancer, which is not how a modern macho man would stand, and he has a braid and nose rings to connect with his mother and to Radha. In many temples, his image is dressed in female attire *Stri-vesha* on festival days to remind us of Krishna's feminine form, *Mohini*. In one South Indian folk story, Krishna and Arjun go around the country, dressed as an old woman and a young girl respectively, tricking villains to do their bidding. In a tale from north Tamil Nadu, Arjuna's son, Aravan, by a Naga woman called Ulupi, has to be sacrificed before the war at Kurukshetra. But he refuses to be sacrificed until he gets married. Since no woman is willing to marry him, Krishna takes the form of *Mohini* and becomes his bride for one night. The next day, *Mohini* wails for him as a widow. In the *raas leela*, only Krishna is supposed to be male. So when Shiva wants to participate in the *raas leela*, he takes the form of a *gopika* and so is worshipped in Vrindavana even today as *Gopeshwar Mahadev*. The Krishna stories are unique for their great compassion for the villains. *Kamsa*, *Jarasandha* and *Duryodhana* are the three main villains in Krishna lore. All three are said to have traumatic childhoods: *Kamsa* is a child of rape who is rejected by his mother at birth. *Jarasandha* is born malformed at birth, his father's two queens each give birth to half his body, and the two halves are then fused together by the ogress called *Jara*. *Duryodhana*'s mother is blindfolded in solidarity with his blind father, so he is unseen by his parents all his life. This explains that people perceived to be evil often have been wronged, which makes them so insecure that they become insensitive and dehumanised. Rog L in his article *Guided Reading Basics* says "Retelling encourages readers to attend to the meaning of the text; reinforces elements of story structure, such as character, setting, and plot; requires readers to distinguish between key ideas and supporting details; encourages communication and oral language development" (123).

The retellings of the epics facilitate an awakening of the self. They enrich Indian literary narratives by its elasticity of structure and by its flexible and fluid nature. Thus it becomes unique

in the history of literature where the reader has been granted the freedom to read and retell the text depending on his inclination and discretion. Thus by adding new shades to already told stories, these retellings enrich the Indian narrative tradition. Modernising the Indian myth serves to make the mythology more relatable to the contemporary group of onlookers. In today's identity conscious liberal society and patriarchal tradition, value systems have been deliberately subverted or interrogated by the feminist thinkers, theorists and authors through their writings, dialogues and debates. A feminist claim to the retelling of the epics is, therefore, extremely significant as they make women, central to these stories as narrators or as lead characters. The synthesis of traditional mythology and modernity of the present world here presented through the retellings, is a message for those who are rooted to the orthodox traditionalism and also for those who are uprooted from the ethics of their own culture. Pattanaik's retelling gives emphasis to asserting the identity of women and also inspiring contemporary readers to look at the classic epics with a new enlightened perspective.

Pattanaik's fiction deceptively simple and exquisite in terms of literary theory and technique, is distinct for its voice, its fusion with the characters that are really bold and its philosophical depth. He is famed for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid, decorated but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises. He has the special ability to make the rhythms, intricacies and humanism of Indian life accessible to people all over India and other cultures around the world. Pattanaik typically portrays the peculiarities of human relationships and the ironies of Indian daily life, when modern urban existence clashes with ancient tradition. His style is graceful, marked by genial humour, elegance and simplicity.

The reason behind the upsurge in the mythological retellings is that today's youth is interested in getting familiar with the cultural roots. The emergence of new readers who have

grown up to listening to the stories and are now reading it in a language familiar to them evokes a sense of pride in Indian culture. The writer's ability to reinterpret the myths to suit modern sensibilities adds an inspiring touch. But apart from this, it is more intriguing, that there is a universal appeal in the way the stories are narrated right from the character's journey to the end. Changing the mode of narration from the universal to an individual point of view and bringing out the human side of Gods have changed the reader's way of looking at them. These characters possess all human emotions, they fight, they bleed and their actions are not driven by a higher purpose.

Modern retellings are more political and less reverent, more judgemental and less enquiring. In spirit, they are very different from the *Ramayana* that nourish the Indian soul. They share the same literary narrative but not the same emotional narrative. The Goddess in Hindu scriptures is not the female version of God favoured by feminists, nor is God the all- powerful, judgemental external agency described in the Bible, who sets down codes of conduct and determines what is right and wrong. God is not even the deified hero of Greek mythology, which greatly informs the modern rational and atheist discourse. Goddess and God have very particular meanings in the Hindu understanding of the Universe. The retellings and the reinterpretations encompassing both opinions and truths are illuminating interpretations. According to social constructivists, truth is based on the reality of social systems and the social processes. So, according to retelling mythological texts, they are true in their own form of society. They are constructed based on the values and norms formed through social processes. It is recorded that Vyasa has created two versions of the epic. The one is an abridged version of the epic and the other is an extended version. At first Vyasa wrote *Bharatha* consisting of twenty four thousand slokas which formed the abridged version and then he expanded it into one containing one lakh

slokas which became the *Mahabharatha*. Pattanaik retellings have carved a unique place in the world of literature. They reflect and comment on the prevailing or predominant tendencies of the social, political and cultural atmospheres thus facilitating valuable lessons for the reader. They are also helpful in channelising cultural continuity. Retellings are illuminating interpretations of the eternal values that are present in the timeless epics facilitating an awakening of the self.

Chapter 5

Summation

India is the land of *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas*, a land which is vibrant with stories and myths that cater to all the five senses. An incredible writer Devdutt Pattanaik explores the epics in a beautiful manner revealing lessons for human life and the higher spiritual consciousness. The three works of Devdutt Pattanaik chosen for the study namely *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata* are not only awe-inspiring retellings of the great epics but also a philosophical exposition of Indian way of life. The works chosen for study are not only an assertion and affirmation of Indian values but an acute and melancholic longing for such affirmation which stems from one's being alienated from the core of one's self. Pattanaik exposes the conflict between the inner self and society, a native land and an exile land and the state of in-betweenness of characters beautifully. He highlights the profound thoughts of identity crisis, conflicts between the human and nature, understanding of ethnicity and socio-cultural concerns that speak to our times. The problems of exile and natural conflicts are well displayed in these works. A writer's concern with their immediate social scenario has come to be considered as not only an important but also a necessary virtue. It always performed this function of strengthening the notion of a society as an entity, continuing into a future.

One of the distinctive features of modern literature is its increased social consciousness and concern. An important concern of their social consciousness continues to be the issues related to women. Charles H. Cooley in his article "Social Consciousness", defines the term:

Social consciousness is a wide ranging and all inclusive term that automatically refers to culture, ideology, religion, socio-political economic factors operating in society that largely go in the making of consciousness of an individual in life.

Consciousness is the state or faculty of being conscious, as a condition and the concomitant of all thoughts, feelings and volitions, the recognition by the thinking subjects of its own acts or affections. (64)

Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's mind. It signifies the totality of impressions, thoughts and feelings which makes up a person's conscious being. The concept of social consciousness involves a web of attitudes, tendencies, desires, ideologies and culture that a writer likes. Pattanaik subtly and imperceptibly weaves the elements of social consciousness with special focus on the strifes and triumphs of women as individuals into the very warp and weft of his works.

Karl Marx, in his article, says "Human beings enter into certain productive, or economic, relations and these relations lead to a form of social consciousness" (1). In the social production of the life, humans enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. Social consciousness is linked to the collective self-awareness and experience of collectively shared social identity. By the experience of the collectively shared social identity, individuals may experience social unity. Karl Marx also identifies that humans can also distinguished consciousness from animals. In his article "Consciousness Derived From Material Conditions From The German Ideology" he states that the "the first form of ownership is tribal, this is when people lived by hunting or fishing, their division of work was within families and was under a patriarchal order"(13). Devdutt Pattanaik states that human estrange themselves from the individual within, as well as from relationships with other individuals. He says one

expands one's consciousness and outgrows the ways of the jungle. It means that while an animal is driven by the instinct to see other creatures as predator, prey, rival or mate, humans have the ability to outgrow such instincts and empathise with the other. It expands consciousness and helps to adopt rules and traditions and follow *dharma*.

Pattanaik explores narratives of gender, culture and nature weaving invaluable lessons for humanity through the incidents in the retelling. The characters in these books face innumerable complications such as fragmentation, disintegration of family, lack of identity, natural conflicts which primarily create chaos and collisions. He describes the issues relating to identity, moral values, social consciousness and natural disasters which are the pivotal concerns of life and living. The study showcases the lives of epic characters who have undergone the primitive communal experience, experienced the pressure of social and aesthetic ideals of the era. He sketches a profound and clear picture about the ethnic aesthetic concepts and ideal qualities in accordance with the ancient and the modern society. With an understanding of these, the characters attain self-realisation and break the barriers of silence and tradition. In *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, Pattanaik depicts his characters both from the perception of monarchy life and the natural world. Through his characters Ram and Sita, he probes into the notions of individual identities. Pattanaik traces Sita's journey as she navigates through precarious scenarios that endanger her life, identity and self-respect. Her struggle for survival and her triumph over evil is inspiring. Pattanaik epitomises the distinctive persona of Indian woman and her marginalisation in patriarchal society. He provides a deep glimpse of the plights of women, their agony because of marriages and motherhood and how they feel restrained by customs and norms. He binds the relationship of Sita and the Mother Earth together who are very

much similar to each other. He portrays the life of Sita who has been often trapped in a variety of experiences.

An exploration of Pattanaik's works shows how the poignant freshness of the retelling narratives mesmerise his readers. His impressive sensibilities and nuances of handling both the ancient and the modern culture hand in hand, expressing human experience in a broader way, especially through the experiences of women lends his works a unique charm. Pattanaik exhibits the effervescences of Sita's wilderness experiences and her all-embracing blending into the adopted forest and its way of life. In *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, the reality assists to display the emotional tangles and interconnectedness in family. It also helps to resolve the conflicts within family and strives to reunite with them. Sita and Ram uncoil their stories of the past and the present in two different perspectives. Reality alleviates the distress of present mind and visualises the future.

Pattanaik adds that Sita is caught in the midst of an unfortunate turn of royal family events over which she has little control. But she becomes the symbol of someone who braves circumstances against all odds and abides by virtue no matter what the cost. Pattanaik portrays Sita as a traditional archetype woman whose experiences oscillate between tradition and search for individuality. She finally surmounts all the sufferings inflicted by the patriarchal society and goes back to her Mother Earth. Pattanaik showcases Sita as an example for the strong woman who tries hard to grasp individual identity. He adds a piquant flavour to his works by poignantly encapsulating the reality through pictures of emotional rendezvous amongst the characters and their responses to the various life-changing incidents.

In *Mahabharata Social Consciousness In Contemporary Writing: Challenging Ideology*, R. Shashidhar observes, "Consciousness does not deny things, its function on the contrary is to

speaking of them; quite simply it purifies them and makes them innocent, fixes them in nature and eternity, gives them a clarity which is not explained but of statement”(21). By clinging to the consciousness, people try to learn values. Even though their thoughts are old, it revives to live in the present life. The value of thoughts function as a resultant of self- power and individual realisation. Terry Eagleton has mentioned about the individual life in his work *Literary*

Theory:An Introduction:

The way in which what we say and believe connects with the power structure and power relations of the society live in... not simply the deeply entrenched often unconscious beliefs held, but rather...more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving, and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power (19)

In *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, Pattanaik vividly throws light on a host of aspects such as conflicts between individual and social life, cultural agony, clashes for power, fluctuating relationships and the journey to self- discovery. As an enigmatic woman of substance, Draupadi finds an unhappy life in the Panadava clan. Pattanaik shows Draupadi's and Kunti's psychological endurance through the irrepressible tears and silence. Draupadi breaks down all her barriers and makes her as story as a saga of suffering and disgrace. The characters are caught between the two worlds. Pattanaik sketches Draupadi as a fiery princess bent on vengeance who could also be compassionate and generous. She develops the strength to bear the trials of life. She is no way lesser than Bheema or Arjuna in strength and spirit, valour and virtue. The characters like Sita, Draupadi experience the state of in-betweenness and try to break the stereotypical assumptions regarding women in society.

Pattanaik creates his woman characters as survivors and great fighters against the male-dominated and rule – bound society. He gives deep insight about the women psyche and their disparate experiences in society. Gender inequality is a multifaceted problem which deteriorates the condition of women. Pattanaik employs his writings as a vehicle to probe into the lives and experiences of women. Myths have a specific purpose. In her article “Myth”, Shashi Deshpande says, "Myth have given us a moral framework by which we live” (2). Pattanaik on his choice of the stories from the epics points out that they have an important place in all our lives. In most of the stories the reader is face to face with the celebrated women characters of the great Indian epic. These women namely, Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, Amba and Gandhari are illustrious icons of Indian mythology. These are the characters that are admired, adored and idealised for their perfect feminine attributes. The writer Nirmala Prakash in her interview in *Midday* has rightly commented on the mythical method adopted by Devdutt Pattanaik, "By adopting a refreshingly new approach, the author relates the past to find its meaning in the present”(4). This myth contributes to the contemporary women's experiences and thus by reinterpreting them, Pattanaik thus moves from femininity to feminism and also makes the characters credible through the authenticity of the mythical context. The angelic halo that surrounds the mythical characters of these stories blends perfectly with the cultural ethos of India. Acceptance helps women to acquire something positive from their personal experiences. Their acclimatisation is the result of all their hardships they have experienced. Their adaptability is the only way to uncover the meanings in their life which show the path to lead a secure and satisfied life. An exploration of identity helps them to carve their own paths, they came to a realisation and understanding of reality. The self – realisation accomplishes them to recreate their new identity that will classify them.

In *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, Pattanaik points out the past constraints that affect the personal life and dreams of Sita. After fourteen years of exile, she is addressed as the queen of Ayodhya for just a day. Again she is forced into exile into the forest. Pattanaik also discusses about Sita's motherhood and her struggles in raising her two sons. He highlights how Indian society gives importance to the institution of marriage in the life of woman. Marriage is highlighted as a necessity and inevitable for a woman. Sita feels trapped in the traditional roles as a wife and mother is the archetype of a stereotypical woman. Women are mostly always blamed for the mistakes of the men. It is a strange kind of escapism for the men who want to dominate the women. The close study of golden deer incident showcases that it was not Sita's desire which had led the millions of soldiers to death. It was Ravana's temptation towards Sita which had led to the death of millions of soldiers.

As a traditional Hindu woman, Draupadi and Kunti give respect to traditions, customs and moral values and obey the principles of monarchy. These women create a rhetoric space in their era by using their own gentle power. Women want to break the barrier of patriarchy in their pursuit of individuality and yet wish to maintain a fine balance with tradition. Pattanaik expounds the aspirations and nostalgia of these epic women who aspire to recreate their own lives in wilderness. They even face the issues of self-identity which impinge upon them with overlapping challenges that suffocate their very existence. The agony that is inflicted forces them to feel disconnected from their own people. Pattanaik's retellings depict that women also have their own rights and public obligations as every citizen. Confronting social challenges which affect their whole life, Pattanaik's retelling helps to understand the problems of space, identity, liberty and explores their interconnectedness in the society. The stories of ancient mythology thus are indeed a source of inspiration to the literary artist.

Examining human perception of wilderness and touching upon environmental issues in popular culture and modern literature, the writer points out that the ecological value system is not distinct from our ethical and social value system. He points out that the struggles and challenges of the characters who have had to build and rebuild their relationship with nature learn and unlearn a lot of lessons along the way. The characters either try to adapt to the forest land or attempt to maintain their native land. It affects them both psychologically and physically but paves the way for important observations on man-nature conflict. His realistic approaches towards exploration of nature speak about real life experience and explore the unfavourable situations and environments in one's life. He attempts to reveal the need for balance in the relationship between nature and man. Pattanaik, in his writings furnishes an exquisite platform to portray how nature is a sanctuary. Nature provides, sustains and nourishes. Though Sita is confined in the traditional roles, she finds herself attached to the wilderness.

Pattanaik explores the experience of reality through the multiplicitous encounters of the characters in various challenging situations. He describes the experience of identity through the characters to help understand the true manifestation of two different lands. Sita and Draupadi accept their identity in the forest land and lead their exultant lives. On the other hand, Ram and Pandavas feel guilt for their mistakes and yearn to take their wives to their respective homelands. This conflict creates further the turmoil and tumult in their lives. Pattanaik ruptures the manacles of epic woman by valiantly voicing out the state of woman in Indian society. Through his retellings, he highlights the social glitches, suppression of women, the connection between the nature and the human, the lack of vigour in women's lives and importance of human relationships.

The issues of *Dharma* and *Adharma* arise when there is a conflict between good and evil. *Shyam: An Illustrated Retelling of the Bhagavata* deals with primarily how mankind lets go of *Dharma*. Pattanaik voices the conundrum of maintaining *Dharma* and doing one's *Karma* reinforcing the primary concept of God and prayer. Pattanaik says God is love and the only way you can let him into your life and heart is to love all of his creations. The characters like Radha, Krishna's mother and Balram find divine love in Krishna's path. Pattanaik explores the global in local, touching a range of faculties from the intellectual to the emotional, tracing the universality in human experiences.

Through his retellings, Pattanaik highlights the essence of these epic tales giving the readers a chance to see a world that depicts the different shades of human life and experiences, a world that presents both the good and the bad and a world where people develop resilience and embrace reality or fight it. All the characters travelling through his verbal canvas are torch bearers of different aspects of human mind and intentions. Through them, lessons, values, ethics and principles for a good conduct of life is clearly indicated. His retellings bring to light the hitherto untold and unexplored facets of the epics making it a delightful intellectual and engaging escapade. Expression of social awareness is what makes a work of literature a unique. Literature reflects society and retellings record the journey of human life through generations facilitating a unique bridge between the past and the present providing the capability to understand and derive newer interpretations. Pattanaik's works build a bridge between the old and the new, bringing together modern perspectives and ancient narratives facilitating the creation of eternal truths in a world plagued by transient travesties. This renders his works unmatched authenticity and a unique sensibility that will remain forever as a perennial source of inspiration for readers.

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