

Chapter 6

Conclusion

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Indian mythology preserved the ancient people's rich traditions and customs. Indian culture has persisted because of mythology. It is critical for an Indian to understand the traditions carried out by our ancestors, as well as the meaning associated with them. The epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were initially translated into regional languages in India and later into English for the benefit of the global readers.

Ramayana is known for its perfectionist aspects; it functions as a teacher, instructing readers on how to live an ideal, ethical life. *Mahabharata* contains realistic events and characters. It is replete with *Dharma* codes, moral ideals, ethics, and a plethora of practical remedies for living. Indian Epics depict numerous cultural practices, beliefs, and human existence in the ancient time. To preserve the virtues described in the epics, they recounted them as an oral tradition, incorporating appropriate values and beliefs from the historical period. These epics were passed down through generations.

The *Mahabharata* is a perfect work of art that is beneficial to understand the diverse attitudes of the characters about customs and traditions. It delves into the contemporary Indian authors' attitude towards rituals and traditions. As such, it can be used to analyse the current generation. The complex characters and events of the *Mahabharata* have paved way for several interpretations and perspectives. However, the ancient text that purports to be original cannot be used to assess contemporary culture because it has been retold numerous times with the addition of necessary

moral values according to age. In order to examine the contemporary societal issue the modern retellings of *Mahabharata* will be a choice, as change is an inevitable part of existence. Contemporary Indian authors Pattanaik, Neelakantan, Kane and Nadkar have used *Mahabharata* to portray the current social hierarchies and indirect subjugation over the mass. Numerous ancient practices are still followed with some difference and have a new form. The primary texts viz. *Jaya: an Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010), *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* (2013), *Karna's Wife: an Outcast's Queen* (2014) *Shakuni: Master of the Game* (2019) have been chosen for this study with this purpose of dissecting and exploring cultural and social issues.

The primary texts are analysed in light of Antonio Gramsci's 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony', introduced traditional and organic intellectuals from the text on the basis of Gramsci's idea of Intellectuals and also exhibited the capitalists' society that is established in the texts. Gramsci conducted an in-depth analysis of society and developed his theory. One of the main tenets of Neo-Marxism is the examination of the link between society and culture. As mythology serves as a medium for the transmission of Indian culture from generation to generation, with the change in the lifestyle of the people their cultural practice also changes. Similarly, Epics are also altered at times according to the need of the people, incorporating the changed cultural values. The retold epic helps to analyse the link between society and culture.

The retellings of *Mahabharata* express and address Indian culture; they are evaluated through a Neo-Marxist perspective. Gramsci proposed a viable remedy for the Proletariat's oppression. This hypothesis appeared to be both practical and functional. It is also visible in a broad spectrum in the current environment. This research is an attempt to uncover cultural features and domination using culture as a tool in the retellings of *Mahabharata*.

The source texts are scrutinised critically; with a new narrator, the entire story takes on a new view, justifying all the unjustifiable actions of the characters in the original story. It is through the retellings of *Mahabharata* that the epic character's character has been subverted. Characters that were once viewed as villains are now viewed as heroes. The authors of these retellings have focused exclusively on the characters and events from the original book to convey their message especially to the modern audiences.

The authors' goal differs, and they have justified it accordingly. There are few parallels and dissimilarity amongst the contemporary retellings of *Mahabharata*. This similarity and dissimilarity arise from the authors purposes of writing. The retellings of *Mahabharata* provided a new perspective on the epic and have also provided the characters with a rational mind. Rational explanations for the occurrences are added by eradicating the myth. Thus, to assess the current situation, retellings of *Mahabharata* are an apt choice because they deal with the prevailing social concerns indirectly through the mythical characters. The brilliance of the authors of these retellings is evident in their ability to handle these characters deftly and to express their views on prevalent and dominant culture.

People, throughout the epic period, have been ruled and controlled by laws derived from *Shastras*. Each caste had its own *Dharma*. Throughout the ancient period, the concept of Heaven and Hell was widespread and was strongly believed in. Individuals who violate the *Dharma Shastra* were believed to go to hell, as they obeyed the rules, which, nevertheless, were created in a way that favoured the upper caste. Shudras, for instance, loyally followed the rules out of fear of going to hell or receiving a curse and punishment from the upper caste. “. . . the caste system, during

every historical period, has been playing the role of a useful ideology for maintaining hegemony of different ruling classes.” (Sinha 63)

Culture is a key factor especially in the lives of mythical female characters. Women then were dominated by the ruling class through cultural standards. To analyse a society, it is vital to validate the connections between men and women, as men and women are inextricably tied in the Indian framework of cultural supremacy. It is plain to see that all the female characters are dominated by the ruling caste (*Kshatriyas*) in accordance with their needs. According to Antonio Gramsci, the ruling class manipulated the powerless and spread their doctrines in such a way that they accepted them without any opposition. By convincing people that certain cultural traditions were unalterable and inevitable, the ideologies were put into effect. Women were thus subjugated not only because of their gender, but also because of their caste.

In the retellings of *Mahabharata* female characters were led to believe that they are destined to bear children as heirs for their kingdom. This is viewed as a political need that was met through the assistance of women. It is demonstrated in the case of the queens Ambika and Ambalika, who were compelled to bear children even after their husband's death. Women were subjugated by the ruling caste, and they had no choice but to accept it. These individuals have been depicted in such a way that if they rejected or acted contrary to this, the outcome would be catastrophic. For instance, Ambika and Ambalika expressed their opposition to this practise which resulted in the birth of unhealthy infants. The ruling caste is attempting to subdue and mould women through this cultural practice in order to maintain the cultural norms strictly. The portrayal of Pandu and Dhritarashtra as sick individuals is to spread the idea that a woman should not rebel against the conventions and traditions regulated by the ruling caste, as the result would be disastrous. Fearful of such an existence, the

women readily embrace all coerced rituals and traditions, which have been demonstrated by Kunti and Madri's willingness to create offspring from celestial beings who were not their husbands. For the development of nations, women are tamed by cultural norms and coerced into such behaviours.

Women characters are dominated for selfish reasons; this is also demonstrated and substantiated by the characters Gandhari, Draupadi, Ambika, and Ambalika, who are all subjugated using power. Gandhara, Kashi, and Panchala were dominated by Hastinapur, the great empire. They vow to use their military might to prevent marriages. They developed their kingdom through marriage. People who lack power are forced to surrender their princesses to the prince of Hastinapur. They persuaded the kings for each marriage by promoting the brighter side and by subtly threatening them.

Hegemony, as Gramsci states, is acceptance of the dominance. The women characters mentioned above are the best examples. "Gramsci also said that hegemony is an act of accepting the supremacy of one class upon another instead of using force. . ." (Al-Amin and Masum Sikdar 3) Not only the women characters but in most of the instance the upper caste Guru Drona, Dhaumya and the lower caste Takshaka and his clan, Subala King of Gandhara and Drupada King of Panchala all accept the domination over them by the Kingdom of Hastinapur and Bhishma. The economic power held by the Hastinapur Kingdom made them stronger and superior.

In contrast to the mythical female characters discussed previously, novelist Kavita Kane has created the fictional character Uruvi. This character has completely subverted all age-old notions, beginning with marriage. Uruvi determines everything. Uruvi chooses to marry Karna despite all challenges and constraints. This character demonstrates that inter-caste marriages are possible when a woman is adamant about

her choice. However, the author portrays Uruvi in such a way that by breaking cultural rules, the people around her, including her family members, begin to hate her and eventually discard her as a family member. This demonstrates the impact of inter-caste marriages in the contemporary day. Even today, many individuals in India oppose inter-caste marriages. They either ignore them or murder them. While honour killings continue to occur in India, there are many people working to alter the community and accept inter-caste marriages.

Humiliation in the name of caste may be eradicated, and humans can be seen for who they truly are, regardless of their caste identification. Even in today's technologically advanced society, caste has become an integral part of many people's identities, and they fight tooth and nail to maintain their honour. This quality of difference and superiority does not exist just among the upper and lower castes; it also exists among the lower castes. Thus, inter-caste marriages can contribute to the eradication of caste-based domination, for which men and women alike should be brave and courageous in making judgments, like Uruvi does. Women are inextricably related to cultural domination and serve as an antidote to such dominations.

Caste plays a crucial role in education, as the characters Karna and Ekalavya demonstrate. Both of them are skilled in archery but were denied the opportunity to learn them due to their inferior caste and economically low status. Modern authors have transmitted such ideals by depicting them as heroes who already possess all necessary knowledge. They do have the capacity to attain the status of a *Kshatriya*. Both characters are viewed in opposition to one another in this scene. One person loses his life because of him being a *Nishada*, while the other works tirelessly to attain and demonstrate to the world that he can also be a *Kshatriya*.

Ekalavya is oppressed and exploited by a *Brahmin*, but these enslavement and manipulation do not devastate Karna's fate since he learns to break the rules. In the instance of Takshaka, who attempts to persuade his clan members into rebelling against the ruling caste by instilling revolutionary beliefs. However, his plan fails because the ruling class people are so powerful that they use their authority to destroy them. Gramsci proposes a functional explanation for this kind of dominance. According to him, one must develop into an organic intellectual within their group, propagate their ideas, and demonstrate to the world that they can propagate a superior political thought. "They had to understand hegemony – namely that the ruling class rules not merely with coercion but with consent as well; that the communist must convince the country that their project is legitimate and that they are the authentic leaders of this national project" (Namboodiripad and Pillai 14).

Namboodiripad and Pillai observe that, "Gramsci's *Prison notebooks* marked a beginning in the examination of the growth of intellectuals and political parties on the basis of Marxist-Leninist understanding. It is the duty of Marxist-Leninist in all countries to put to practice Gramsci's methodology in accordance with the context of their respective country" (82) Thus Gramsci's methodology can be applied to different countries according to its context.

Gramsci asserts that the working-class people must create their intellectual, who can propagate unified ideas beneficial for them and prove the ruling class that they are capable of producing beneficial projects for the country and that they can also rule them. This becomes the only way to escape from the dominant class rules. "According to Gramsci, unless subordinate classes bring up their own intellectuals, they will not succeed in resisting the civil society to the state led by dominant class" (Namboodiripad and Pillai 78). This is demonstrated by Karna, who is the best

example of an organic intellectual. He acts like a *Kshatriya*, proving them wrong that a *Shudra* lacks the knowledge necessary to learn warfare, and he achieves equal prestige and authority to a *Kshatriya*, as well as economic advancement by eradicating poverty.

Gramsci claims that in a civil society the ruling class people live according to their wish with the consent they claimed from the mass. Force was not mostly used by the ruling class people unless there is any opposition from the mass. “Civil society is organized based on the general consent that the ruling class enjoys from people. On the other hand, the state chooses to employ force mostly in matters in which people do not enjoy consent” (Namboodiripad and Pillai 77) This is observed in the instance of Bhishma’s marriage proposal to Gandhara. Bhishma went with great army and was ready wage war if they disagree for the proposal. The ruling class asks for the consent if the lower class deny, then they use force over them to accomplish their desire.

The lower caste people are always made to believe that they are destined to take orders from the upper caste people, but their disobedience causes major effect over them. Ekalavya’s act of learning archery despite his having been denied learning caused him to lose his thumb finger and completely made him unable to practice in his whole life. Gramsci’s statement that “. . . in civil society, the class enjoys nearly complete consent of the majority of people. It is when consent starts to disappear that state exerts increasing force in order to subordinate the people” (Namboodiripad and Pillai 77) proves true in the case of Ekalavya.

This research is one such attempt of applying Gramsci’s theory to the retellings of *Mahabharata*, unravelling the cultural aspects and ideologies of the capitalist in the selected primary texts taken for the study. As Al-Amin and Sikdar claim “Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is still in practice now”(6) in many parts of

India. To eradicate it completely one must arouse and propagate new ideologies for the existing hegemony. Like, the higher authorities who propose and propagate unfavourable ideas, yet are accepted by everyone. The counter ideology must be proposed and propagated in such a way that it is accepted and supported by a great majority of the people. This paves way for an egalitarian society eradicating indirect dominance over the mass. “It is certainly true that no other Marxist did so excellently effort in this developed capitalist circumstances . . . the absence of the transfixed definitions and active and realistic outlook can be taken as a fresh source of spreading Marxism and this is the way how socialist revolution may rebirth now.” (6)

6.2 Scope for Further Research:

The retelling of Mahabharata could be analyzed using theories like:

- Psychoanalytical theory - In the light of Carl Jung’s ‘Collective Unconscious’.
- Psychoanalytical theory - In the light of Emile Durkheim's ‘Collective Consciousness’.
- Archetypal theory
- Reader response theory.
- Retelling of Mahabharata as a Post-Post Modernist text
- Retelling of Mahabharata as a text of logical reasons.