

**BREAKING BARRIERS: RETELLING INDIAN MYTH AND LEGEND IN SELECT
LITERARY AND TELEVISION NARRATIVES**

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English Language & Literature

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Registration Order No: U.O.No. 14149/2016/Admn

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Breaking Barriers: Retelling Indian Myth and Legend in Select Literary and Television Narratives** is an authentic record of my studies and research carried out under the guidance of Dr. Asha Thomas, Associate Professor & Head, Centre for Research in English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published for the award of any other degree, diploma, title, fellowship or recognition.

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A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that the documentation in the thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested by **MLA Handbook** (9th Edition).

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Abstract

Mythology is a collection of events including myths that form part of a particular culture or civilization. It deals with the life, issues, history, ancestry and the gods associated with them. Since mythology deals with the life and history of a particular society in addition to addressing modern issues and making appropriations, there exist many possible elucidations in which it can be explained. Indian mythology has a very complex and inconsistent structure, and because it can speak of the concerns of the general populace, it has been subject to different interpretations, opening up new avenues for retellings. These reworked narratives resorted to bring to light, the perspective of the ‘other’ side too.

Apart from promising the plurality of maximum narratives about the ancient epics, these new retellings do speak for the overlooked figures, especially for the defeated and losers and represent new spaces for self-esteem and equality. These narratives could bring out newer ways in literary adaptations and raise current socio political and domestic issues with new dynamics of richness. The authors mix mythology with imagination and reality in their endeavor to popularize mythology specifically focusing on cultural revival. As part of the modernization of mythology, the authors are on the verge of attributing human sensibilities to the gods.

As the mythical figures are humanized by attributing the same vulnerabilities of the ordinary people, the gods come closer to the human kind from their hallowed realms by breaking various socio cultural barriers. This

Chapter I

Introduction

Rephrasing Indian Mythical Narratives in Popular Culture

From myth comes beliefs, from mythology, customs. Myth conditions thoughts and feelings. Mythology influences behaviours and communications. Myth and mythology thus have a profound influence on culture (Pattanaik,13).

Mythology is the means by which one might return to the wonderful arena of experience, where one is exposed both to reality and the fantastical. These stories depict the unusual and wonderful world through natural surrounds, social life, and environments and detail about creation, natural resources, and superhuman activities of gods and humans. Myths can also be used to construct social norms and traditions that promote morality. The true goal of literature in human endeavors is to continue mythology's basic attempt to carve out a major role for the human beings in a universe that is unconscious of his existence, thus the relationship between myth and literature has a lengthy history.

Ancient civilizations used mythology to communicate their cognitive processes to the human race. It heightens the timeless mysteries behind the appearance of gods in human form and aids in the disclosure of their inner and abstract feelings, which are incomprehensible to the average reader. These epic stories that have been passed down orally from generation to generation

illustrate how the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* fit into the framework of ancient stories, symbols, and rituals.

Every civilization has its own mythology, which is the people's oral history. It contains a written record of people's stories, as well as gods and goddesses. Likewise, every religion has its own mythology, which is built on a belief structure that has developed over time. The mythology that is available today is the cultural evidence of the past regarding their beliefs, economic structure, lifestyle, socio-political atmosphere and above all, a life immemorial. It is the preservation and protection of a particular community and a conventional lifestyle to be followed throughout. It provides the panorama of ancestral origins, the gods and goddesses, supernatural beings, legends, kings, different incarnations, creations, super humans, their powers and the like.

In a way, mythology is the fundamental explanation for how each religion, their belief system and structure, existence, related orators and gods came into being. Hence mythology, whichever civilization it belongs to, portrays the creation of human beings, of animals and birds, water sources, mountains, certain natural phenomena, particular landmarks, valleys, their characteristics and affinities, of natural events and cycles, nuances of certain rituals and ceremonies and furthermore, the origin of particular customs and practices.

As history of mythology goes beyond explanations, it does not explicitly restrict itself to a specific set of rules. No mythology follows a

general pattern since each one is unique in its form, culture and lingo. Thus myth should be felt and experienced like a stimulus that is meant only to be felt. That is why St. Augustine in his *Confessions* said “I know very well what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked and try to explain, I am baffled” (32).

The terms ‘Myths’ and ‘Legends’ are inseparable and are almost always used and pronounced together. Though legends have a strong historical and geographical foundation, myths describe something beyond life deeds and have evolved through time. Legends are stories about real people or historical events that are linked to a certain location. Myths on the other hand are based on religion, faith, or belief systems and they explain a natural phenomenon rather than telling a story. They feature supernatural beings such as gods, goddesses, deities, kings, queens, and legends, as well as moral precepts. Myths and legends are both traditional stories passed down through generations from different cultures and these stories are presented by oral storytelling. Folk tales, myths, and legends are distinct types of stories that were once passed down from generation to generation orally. Myths and legends usually seen in the form of an allegorical story sometimes include mythological animals and great heroes/warriors.

Though the terms ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’ have distinct meanings in official writing and conversations, nowadays they are blended in both formal and informal conversation. Myths refer to certain stories which are mere stories that have become part of one’s life and culture that lack a proper root

base and the origin and period of which still remains anonymous to people and are blindly accepted and believed as they are portrayed. Sometimes they are supernatural episodes or godly perceptions. Myths amplify and project the notions of gods, superheroes, legends, creations, life and death, religion and divinity and can also be found existing on account with folklores and legends dealing with signifiers and propagating meanings. On the other hand, mythology is the storehouse of myths and events that form part of a specific cultural group as well as community. Each mythology is associated with a particular sect or a group of people. Hence mythology deals with the life, issues, history, ancestry and the gods associated with them. In his *The Hero with a 1000 Faces*, Joseph Campbell states that,

Mythology explains, empowers, stabilizes and elevates the life of a believer from a mundane existence to one imbued with eternal meaning. On the most basic level, a myth explains a phenomenon, tradition, place-name or geological formation but it can also elevate a past event to epic and even supernatural significance and most importantly, provide a role model for one's individual journey through life (4).

Numerous elucidations of mythology are possible since it deals with the life and history of a particular culture besides addressing contemporary issues and making appropriations. On the other hand, myth is not region, religion and time based but can be any kind of conventional story that has been observing by a particular community or society. Their basic accounts are

anonymous and are just meant to be believed and practiced. Moreover, myths provide explanations for certain supernatural features and natural phenomena. Along with that, some incidents and humanitarian features are also being associated with some myths and people believed them and followed as if they were true and genuine.

The very inconsistent and multiple structure of Indian mythology, its faculty in addressing the issues of the common mass paved the way for numerous interpretations and created new paths to retellings. Retelling mythological stories often pushes one character over the other by inventing new characters to make sense of the existing ones. Some mythological works of literature inform readers what happened in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as who the genuine hero or villain was.

Usually gods, goddesses, legends, heroes and common people constitute the characters for retelling. Their life and history serve as a background for the author to portray a socio cultural critique of the contemporary society. Nowadays, new mythologists are on their surer platform regarding how to retell mythology as literary and television narratives. They are remaking those stories people already know in a manner they haven't even thought of.

As mythology is thought and believed to be a living entity that remains close to people of all ages, the literary and television narratives that rely more on mythology, especially its retelling, rethinking and rewriting lead off for a worldwide explosion of reimagined past, in the light of the present. These new mythical narratives, either television or literary narratives, are always placed

and located in the period of time and place that recreated them. Hence, almost all the Indian mythologists who create new mythological fantasies seem to be searching for incidents from contemporary social life, society and religion with the help of mythical ideologies from ancient times.

Popular mythological literary and television narratives that carry the socio-political and spiritual apprehensions made the gods, goddesses as well as legends live and act in favor of the expectations and fantasies of the popular mass. As a matter of fact, these multiple versions flourished as mythology was made to a fundamentalist concept for re-framing the traditional narratives of the ancient times. These reworked narratives enabled the audience to possess the capacity to witness the 'other' side too. In addition, each narrative has got a dramatic purpose to propagate throughout. This mastery of the narratives provides the spectators an open door into the story. Along with that, each person is invited to identify with the characters, events and the plot. Thus this merging helps the viewers see the world contained in the story.

Each narrative is unique in its interpretations and their characteristics would be a combination of myth, history and fantasy. The authors frame the narratives in a fashion that is propelled by universal drives and features and elaborate upon how myths function as a communicative device to serve their intentions and reveal the happenings and persistent issues in the society. Moreover, these narratives also impart the essence and purpose of societal roles into the viewers through the realistic portrayal of the characters.

Popular television and literary mythological fictions often seem to scrutinize the dominant politics behind all these ancient mythological texts. Apart from promising the plurality of maximum narratives about the ancient epics, these new retellings do speak for the overlooked figures, especially for the defeated and the losers and represent new spaces for self-esteem and equality. Besides, they reflect the raw life of contemporary India and offer a different perspective and interpretation based on real life experiences and are often found to be liberated from the fetters of those conventional and historical discriminations.

Mythological texts especially the sacred epics cannot always be explained in terms of singularity for they exist in many versions as per time, space and culture. Prof. A.K. Ramanujan in his essay *Three Hundred Ramayanas*, holds the view regarding the existence of numerous versions of the same epic. He speaks of the text's tendency for multiple interpretations, transpositions and interpolations. Mythology has by now turned into a kind of cultural experience. Nevertheless, these reimagined pasts subvert the existing harsh and rigid notions. These complex narratives of the past are associated with the present to have a rational interference and the gods in turn, are redesigned in accordance with those narratives.

Some critics dismiss mythological tales as fantasy, for being entirely detached from the realities that ordinary people experience in their daily life. Many thoughts from the past seem to be forgotten quickly when they can no longer be directly relevant in their current circumstances. Likewise, mythological narratives and thoughts die away when it is no longer relevant

for the individuals who engage in it. People also no longer recount old fairy tales that do not speak of their current circumstances. As a result their retelling becomes a significant necessity to include current issues. Similarly, mythological fictions that evolve over time portraying the enigmatic and largely invisible aspects of reality, explore the relevant parameters of life at all times and in all locations.

Principally, contemporary rewritings sift all sorts of ambivalences infused upon the weaker sessions. The revisionist use of class, gender and cultural transformations in retellings attempt to reformulate patriarchal ideologies and domestic issues. These narratives could bring out newer ways in literary adaptations and raise current socio political and domestic issues with new dynamics of richness. As it is non-viable to explain the depth of each mythological story in terms of a definite material, it requires numerous tellings to interpret, analyze and research into it. These layers of meaning obtained are far removed from conventional beliefs.

The retold versions of the sacred epics available now are reproduced in innovative ways encompassing new spheres of meanings that have never been explored before. Though Indian mythology has adopted a different approach and a unique style, it still continues to remain as a well appreciated genre in popular works of art. Contemporary mythological writings are no more religious and do not provide any sacred abode to its gods and goddesses. Instead, they are more creative and specific in keeping the texts away from

being sacrosanct. The epical stories are dissected, analyzed, defined and reframed into new thoughts of meaningful discussions.

The Indian epics, in its plain form are absolutely based on faith but when it is rewritten, it takes scientific upgradations sometimes or rational thoughts often. Although it is inescapably true that each retelling has got a parallel association with the sacred mythological epics, those discrepancies among different retellings itself is the explanation for the multiple perspectives rendered by the texts. The close observance and comprehension of mythology and its interlocutions help in comprehending more clearly the remarkable association the present has with the past.

Rather than being mere mythical stories, both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* act as a historical veracity that brings back the old debate about the nature of history and mythology to the forefront. Hence it can be assumed that both are in a dichotomous relationship having no common area between them. The constant struggle of history and mythology to reflect each other in their simultaneous unanimous existence of both, ended up as relative to each other in constructing reality. Though both do not go hand in hand evidentially, they provide semblance of reality to each other. Unlike mythology, history is not completely accorded to imagination. They intersect at a point where both imagination and reality coincide.

The authors blend mythology with imagination and reality in their endeavor to popularize mythology specifically focusing on cultural revival. As

part of the modernization of mythology, the authors are on the verge of attributing human sensibilities to the gods. Consequently, the gods are presented as earthly beings and are seen along with human beings. The authors, who employ mythology to reiterate it, often make it less godly to enable the participation of the popular mass. They have also come forward with a thoroughly different alternative to these traditional legends as well as myths. Such rehashed myths that reside and operate within popular cultural representations are malleable to any sort of reinterpretation. The authors include necessary additions to the existing mythology and produce a unique story. Each and every incident, event, situation, character and even god is treated and looked upon rationally, making the narrative remain incomplete, leaving it before the readers to construe it.

As the mythical figures are humanized by attributing the same vulnerabilities of the common mass, the gods come closer to the earthly beings from their revered realms by breaking numerous cultural shackles. Thus, the once sacrosanct mythological figures are made available to the people as one among them. Many of these characters and their roles perturb the readers so much that they tend to question each and every conventional practice. Often such characters are taken and developed into universal types and these characters, both mythical and modernized become symbolic illustrations of Indian tradition, culture, beliefs and philosophies. Besides, these characters are partly based on mythological ones and some characters are entirely new creations of the authors.

One of the motives behind retelling is to let the readers associate the story, plot, events, characters and actions with contemporary ideologies and setup. The mythical characters are often viewed as cultural representations of the society. By retelling, the authors associate scientific justifications to traditional beliefs with an end to fortify history and culture. Besides, historical contexts too affect mythical writings and rewritings. Since myths are placed within particular historical contexts, the same myth told in two different epochs might vary significantly in their framework and substance. Even before the advent of retellings, there existed different telling of the same story over different periods. These tellings show considerable variations in compliance with the shifts in culture, context and meanings. This turns and twists that occurred naturally are now termed by the contemporary authors as mythical retellings or reinterpretations.

The widespread appeal of mythological retellings in the literary market indicates that as long as mythology and its related figures exist, there will be a lot of different interpretations. In the same way, any cultural intrusion in one's way of life becomes part of mythology. A.K. Ramanujan also added that, there cannot be a particular version which is ultimate because each version of *Ramayana* is the result of a particular age. The story is mainly told a number of times to remind that for every Rama, there is a *Ramayana*. These many Ramayanas and the depth of their impact are amazing. According to him, there are three hundred versions of Ramayanas and each version is different.

Obviously, these hundreds of tellings differ from one another. I have come to prefer the word tellings to the usual terms versions or variants because the latter terms can and typically do imply that there is an invariant, an original or ur-text usually Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana, the earliest and most prestigious of them all. But as we shall see, it is not always Valmiki's narrative that is carried from one language to another (24).

The story may be the same in its different tellings, but the discourse may be vastly different. Even the structure and sequence of events may be the same, but the style, details, tone and texture may be vastly different. These differences in fact, inculcated the coalescence of copious elements from multiple directions irrespective of any external bias, inculcating all possible intentions of mythology. Moreover, retelling has assumed different forms after fleeing through the cloudiness of ancient ages and has by now reached its artistic maturity.

What makes mythology a practice and way of living more than mere stories is the philosophy it propagates. Indian mythology is always open ended and is susceptible to any kind of remarking based on the existing culture and living. As a result, every piece of mythology contains a glimpse of the culture present. This is the reason behind the relation between all sorts of retellings. What gets transplanted, translated and transposed in these hundreds of tellings in different cultures, languages and religious traditions is a relevant question

one would think of asking. Besides, Indian literary market is celebrating the mythological renaissance in retellings for the authors are seeking to reimagine mythology in Indian history. When mythology is integrated into daily life, it takes on new meanings.

There are many studies done in the field of retellings, especially in mythological retellings. Sarah J. Barber, Davis School of Gerontology, University of Southern California had carried out a study on the role of retellings in shaping younger and older adults' memories. The article speaks about how retellings exerted a greater effect on memory in older, compared with younger, adults. Hellen Vretudaki, University of Crete, Greece had analyzed the qualitative aspects of retelling beyond the story structure. The scholar dealt with how the guided practice in retelling enhanced children's capacity for deeper cognition and resulted in further comments about and beyond the text. Wenjuan Qin, Fudan University, China, Helen C. Kingston and James S. Kim, Harvard University, USA had researched in their study "What does retelling 'tell' about children's reading proficiency?" that how children's performance varied across retelling narrative and expository texts and whether that had different implications for reading proficiency.

Sarah Stoutz, St. John Fisher University had discussed about the different methods in retellings. The scholar examined different methods of retelling and the effects of these methods on the quality of retelling produced. Sanika Kulkarni, Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth had come up with a study of

retellings in Indian mythology with special reference to Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita*. The article focussed on the retellings in Indian mythology with special reference to the tales of *Ramayana* and how these tales have gone through a change over the years. The researcher had delved into the aspects involving the constant demand for the mythological tales in present generation with a qualitative approach, the aspects been social, political, cultural and commercial.

An article titled "Retellings of Hindu Mythological Stories through 21st Century Hindi Cinema and Literature" by Sanidhya Sharma, Somaiya Vidyavihar had brought out the correlation between ancient Hindu mythology, modern Indian literature and 21st century Hindi cinema. Dr. Sabita Mishra Lecturer-in-English, K.M. Degree College, Tukla Sambalpur University, Odisha, India had advocated a study on "A Modern Approach to Retelling of Indian Epics and Mythical Characters" which proposed how 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. Vikram Singh Assistant Professor Department of English C.R.M. Jat College, Hisar, India had produced an article titled "Modern Retelling of Indian Myths: A Study of Rehashing Mythology through Popular Fictions" that focussed on how those texts display an array of divergent attitudes towards the characters and incidents in the Indian Epics and Mythology, how those versions of ancient texts reinterpret the mythical past, and how the respective authors utilize myth creatively for coming to terms with the predicament of the present. Shail Kumari and Zeeshan Ali (Research

Scholar in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, NIT PATNA, Patna. and PhD, Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, NIT PATNA, Patna respectively) in their paper titled “Exploring “Feminine Psychology” In Select Mythical Retellings of Amish Tripathi, Kavita Kane and Utkarsh Patel” had strove to bring out how male writers have dominated traditional mythical narratives, which mirror patriarchal views and how revisionist mythmaking became the substitution of feminine components from the peripheral to the centre of patriarchal narratives.

With regard to the aforementioned studies carried out in this filed, it can be inferred that few study has been done in mythological retellings regarding how various barriers are broken when the once holy mythological figures move closer to the human beings as one among them, from their holy abodes. The research is designed based on the textual analysis of the narratives chosen and is structured on the theoretical frame works of Cultural Studies, Myth Criticism, Feminist Revisionism, Refraction, Muted Group Theory, Social Exclusion Theory and so on. It also employs certain literary devices and tools such as Anthropocentrism, Apotheosis, Zoomorphism, Euhemerism and Mediatisation to analyze the texts.

Researchers of cultural studies mainly probe into the role of cultural practices in certain social and political power structures of society. When it comes to the retelling of mythical stories, they focus more on how these cultural practices contribute to the historical foundations of the political dynamics of contemporary society. Culture’s engagement with the different perspectives in the telling of a particular mythology can also be analyzed

theoretically, as it covers a wider platform of learning and edification. The inquiry of culture and cultural studies are never complete as cultural studies itself sees culture as an illimitable, open ended and obtrusive entity. And retelling focuses mainly on culture's relation to power and how it reformulates mythology on the basis of its association to the mythical perspectives. So when retelling is looked upon by the cultural theorists, they study it based on all its complex forms and possibilities and analyze the possible social and political context in which culture manifests itself in mythology. They also pursue further scope in political attributions and attempt to reconcile those ancient stories from which these stories had emerged posthumously.

As modern rewritings have got an allegiance to the radical political action of the society, 'culture studies' in this domain views each rendering as the political construction of contemporary culture and reality. There are mythological studies too that aim in exploring the understanding of human experience revealed in mythology. They aspire to initiate the manifold link between myth and ritual, literature and culture and religious experience. Furthermore, the author borrows the conventional myth and manifests and deciphers it to exhibit reality artistically. This artistry is employed as a valuable tool, equipping the author to deal with the appropriation of mythological elements as contemporary manifestations. Certain mythological allusions are also incorporated while creating expositions of day to day life. The author extends scope for anticipations and contradictory segments of significations while dealing with the fusion of past and present.

The initiation of certain theories has also become a part of this fusion and it is comprehended that the conventions that had slowly evolved out of traditional cultural hybridity had undergone multiple restructuring on the basis of this. The essence of retelling lies in the conception that all things in the world, like the victors, the heroes and the privileged ones are capable of getting subverted their roles and forms at any cost. Retelling is done when a desire gets generated to shower new light on the prevailing old artifacts to make them come out of the shell with a self-recognition of its flaws and values. While retelling, the mythic rhythm and resonance has always to be discerned and as a result, the authors retain the mythic qualities of the ordinary lives by drawing parallel connections to the old mythological stories.

Traditionally, Indian Mythology provided less space for its women characters. India's mythology has always been the abode of patriarchy, keeping those characters away from the mainstream. They were denied access to the main plot and were positioned at the very bottom of the hierarchical pyramid, along with the subaltern. They were also denied of a voice of their own. As a revolt against the traditional patriarchy, many feminist retellings of mythologies are in progress. These feminist retellings tactfully made changes in the level and use of languages by the traditional mythologists. The modern retellers also venture to make these differences in all walks of myth making.

Apart from this deliberate omission of the females, ancient myths and legends disregarded certain other characters too. They remained lost in silence for being marginalized and oppressed. Retellings validated these characters to

come out of the background and hence today many of the retellings are centered on these women as well as vanquished characters. Though some viewers perceive retellings as mere writings which disfigure their gods and goddesses, for those who wish to see the unseen and hear the unheard and vote for a revival in every distorted aspect, retellings are a part of cultural shift.

These multiple methods of revising myths in modernity are what the early figure of Hellenistic period Euhemerus of Messene has coined to be 'Euhemerism'. This approach is on the accord that mythological accounts are speculated to have sprung from real historical occurrences. Though Euhemerus was not the first to attempt to rationalize mythology in historical terms, euhemeristic views are found in earlier writings including those of Xenophanes, Herodotus, Herataeus of Abdera and Ephorus. He believed that, myths about gods were literally legends of real people from a long forgotten past. In modern retellings new theorists strive to revive these forgotten pasts and embed them in the précis of contemporary world, associating with reality. It is the historical interpretation of mythology which treats mythological renditions as a reflection of historical incidents, or mythological characters as historical personages. Euhemerism is the act of rationalizing mythology through history since Euhemerus believed that mythology is the history in disguise.

Myth Criticism too probes deeply into unveiling and recognizing different exposition of mythology. In short, it is the interpretation of myths in literature and literature in myth. Myth Criticism gave rise to certain keywords to set out to a new perspective of mythological studies that fell apart from

archetypal notions. This notion behind every interpretation of myth is what the young writers aimed to put forth by compiling the past and the present. The multifarious scopes it points to has opened up a new version having a new genre to look at it exclusively.

Myth's association with anthropology and human psyche is explained by means of its contribution in bringing together life and culture to these areas with a view to derivate mythical ideologies. Mythology's reflection of the human psyche is replete with intricacies having numerous layers of symbolisms, with multiple angles and perspectives. Mythology deals with the same problem of the humans and its expertise is beyond cognition. Everyone constructs his own consciousness based on his capacity to apprehend and identify the myths' potential.

One of the prime features of mythical retelling is 'Anthropocentrism'. The term is derived from 'anthropos' (human being) and 'kentron' (center) of ancient Greek. It is the treatment of human beings as the most significant entities among all. This concept believes in the interpretation of the world on the basis of human values, thoughts and experiences. Anthropocentrism is regarded as being embedded profoundly in many contemporary cultural manifestations including mythical retellings. Unlike mythology, human beings are the real concern in retellings. This philosophical view point considers human beings to be the center from which rest of the events are developed. As said by many ethicists, the roots of anthropocentrism can be traced back to the creation myth in the book of Genesis. The story says, "Human are created in the image of God and are instructed to subdue Earth and to have dominion

over all other living creatures”(1:26-28). While mythology glorified the gods, retellings humanized them and attributed greater value to human beings based on this philosophical notion.

Mythology is a sea where every wave in it carries meanings and possibilities in plenty. These meanings and possibilities are taken out to work on further by the contemporary authors to explain limited notions and to begin something new advocating for free thinking and interpretation. Eventually this element of open-endedness of mythology attracted many authors to retell it in a quite different setting. Thus they experimented it in their own means and gradually this added to a new genre to the Indian literature. Retelling is occupied with both exemplary and faulty characters along with gods as relatable human beings stuffed with characters having typical contemporary material and wealth seeking frailties.

Later, the authors employed literature for retelling with an eye on creating an entirely different world with an alternative myth applicable to the present situation. These mythological stories' characterization in retellings mainly focus on their re-presentation and have undergone many interpretations and hence an infinite number of transformations. As a result, the profound portrait of myth and mythology in retellings turned out to be the reason for the emergence of a new medium of explication, practice and an alteration of long established theories. Regardless of the articulation of these fundamental concepts, reconstructions appeared to be the rational and critical interpretation of mythology along with the reflections of historical events of the past embodied in the present. Thus the development of a new mythic existence

enthralls the experience of modern life and uncovers the hidden possibilities that every mythology put forward.

Certain cultural manifestations that reopened history made New Historicism gather momentum. “It was in the late 18th and early 19th century that the traditional notion of myth was reinterpreted and the first attempts of historical evaluation of the classical religion appeared”, states Christopher Jamme in his work *Portraying Myth More Convincingly: Critical Approaches to Myth in the Classical and Romantic Periods*. Besides, reflecting mythology on contemporary life has become the broad concern behind each retelling. They tread on and probe into imagined texts, for everywhere people reach for stories. It is so noteworthy that, India has got a wide range of writers who are tactfully dealing with these mythologies and their interpretations. They are actively rethinking, reconstructing and rewriting through words and pictures, paintings and drawings, graphics and comics.

These complex narratives provide room for new arenas of historical fantasies apart from mere perspectives and opinions. So how they prefer to narrate stories that people already knew was a matter of concern for each telling is the multitude of difference in time, place, politics and cultural biases. The new mythologists frame a time and space for accommodating new tellings on surer grounds, for the audience they have to appeal. They employ their artistic freedom to expand those boundaries of religion, caste, gender and class consciousness. They have also been experimenting narratives intended for the readers based on those myths and legends for many decades. This perceived

plurality of the different retellings of the past serves numerous purposes that might require today. They all are truly diverse stories having logical unity in the ideology they propagate.

Another myth-making approach used in the process of demythification is the 'revisionist' usage of mythical narratives. Here, the elementary concepts are being explored and made to transform into some other mode of representation. In simple words, a revisionist approach to mythology is to 'subvert' what is available and what has been practicing till now. It is the way of having a second look, reading and interpreting with a new perspective. The places and contexts where retellings seem inevitable or situation that demands retelling go for a revisionist strategy to engage with mythology. The most important area in which it is applied is in feminism.

Feminist revisionist mythology is all about the subversion of gender imagery from the perspective of a female. Revision as the name suggests, is the mode of re- visioning whatever that is old, to make them alive and exist in the world one lives in. For Adrienne Rich, Revision is the act of seeing something over again from a different perspective. Feminist revisionist mythology tends to disclose the political deception and the inconsistencies in historical narratives especially those ones that make them feel as if humiliating to their sexuality. Many consider retelling as inevitable since they wanted the phallogentric and the male ideology of female representation to get subverted. For women, revision is more than just a chapter in cultural history for women. It is a survival action, a process of looking back, seeing with new eyes, and accessing an old work from a new critical perspective.

Each and every text that falls into the male narrative are re-visioned and looked upon with an aim to unveil those unjust patriarchal practices and hierarchical conventions. Those situations and the canonic representations in which female identity and gender is getting shaped and defined in the hands of the males are being visioned again in their attempt to get hold of the situation. Those fallacies based on the construction of female identity and those fabricated gender politics are being produced to make necessary edits to replenish a new mode of perception. Re-tracing those already set and defined texts to re-examine the past through multiple angles often create the scope for falsifying certain specific motives hidden in them. The crux of revisionist myth making lies in the questioning of gender stereotypes with the help of supporting conventions from literature and society. Like any other myth making theories, this mode of re-tracing the past narratives intends to bring in 'the other' to the mainstream, placing it in the forefront as one among the primary subjects.

One of the leading analytical tools based on retelling strategy is propounded by André Alphonse Lefevere the most notable name when it comes to translation studies. Apart from his contributions in the field of translation studies as well as comparative literary studies, he has provided an identity to the act of retelling by means of translation through the newly formed concept of 'Refraction'. He holds that each and every kind of rewriting helps in manipulating literature to fit into a given social background and enables to reflect certain fundamental ideologies irrespective of the intention behind

those tellings. He came forward with the notion of 'right reading' while explaining his concept. He supposes that, refractions help the readers to identify each text as powerful as they are with a view to perpetuate and ensure 'right readings' in the same way the readers read each text. For Lefevere,

Refraction is something that denotes the rewriting of texts (the production of plays) in order to make them acceptable for a new audience. In the process, virtually every feature of the original may be changed, or else very little may be changed. Changes will usually fall under three categories: a change of the language in which the original is written, with its concomitant socio-cultural context, a change of the ideology of the original (i.e., its 'word view' in the widest, not just the political sense of the word) and a change of the poetics of the original (i.e., the presuppositions as to what is, or is not, literature that can be seen to have guided the author of the original, whether he/she follows them or rebels against them) (192).

Yet another most common and important literary device that leaps into mythical retellings is 'Anthropomorphism'. Often considered to be an innate tendency of human psychology, it deals with the attribution of human forms, traits, emotion and characteristics to non-human entities, objects or natural phenomenon. Their ancient roots can be traced from storytelling, fables, fairy tales and mythology. Most traditional cultural fables and mythology employ anthropomorphized figures as characters. It assigns certain actions to animals

to substantiate human behavior. These anthropomorphized entities later on become similar to that of other human characters capable of dealing with situations as humans do. Hence a literal differentiation is not possible since they too involve in leading the plot.

Anthropomorphism in reverse is known as Zoomorphism. It is the act of representing or assigning a person or deity, animalistic features and qualities. In short, it is the attribution of animalistic emotions and mental states to human beings. This term was derived from the Greek word 'Zoom' (animal) and 'morphe' (form or shape). Here, non-animal objects are subjected to perform the role of animals and their traits. Certain events are also being ascribed with animal attributes. At times, this technique is also used to assign the feature of one animal to another. The super humans that appear in many of the legends and mythologies are a result of this technique. Examples include Spiderman, Ant man, Batman, Cat woman and Black Panther. In mythology, such observations can be made in the characters of Ganesha, Nandi and Hanuman. In classic literature, Sphinx is an example.

The significance of Zoomorphism is mainly found in the fields of mythology, legendary tales, folklores, religion, classical epics and literature, modern fiction such as comics, science fiction and thrillers. Many gods were portrayed as Zoomorphic entities in numerous different religion and mythologies. This is almost similar to the term 'Therianthropy', which is the ability of a human to shape shift into the form of an animal. This technique is

found to be the most prominent feature and prowess of the gods and goddesses in mythologies. Zoomorphism in art employs animals as 'Visual Motif'.

'Apotheosis,' which means 'making divine' in Greek, is another theoretical method to recounting. It is also known as deification. In this technique, a subject is being glorified or is elevated to the status of God or to divinity. In Latin the word 'deificatio' means 'making divine'. Most often, it treats humans like that of God or lifts them up to the group of God-like figures. In art, the term implies the treatment of any concept in an exalted manner. Many of the retellings employ this tool to treat those over looked characters from mythology in a grant manner. Especially when it comes to art, this elevation involves certain conventions. Apotheosis, though literally involves the process of deification, deals with abstract notions. It is also associated with a sort of metaphorical deification and was a customary term in the ancient times since it was used to refer to a particular ceremony explaining the mortal God. Apotheosis stands opposite to reincarnation or rebirth.

The aftermath of cultural collapse gradually resulted in the advent of Deification. One of the best examples is the glorification of Buddha and his elevation into the status of God. The irony is that Buddha himself was against the concept about God. Like Buddha, Mahavira too became God by the same means. Historical evidences show that the repeated foreign invasions and the hazardous threats faced by India during the middles ages have given rise to the Bhakthi movement which in turn bore fruit in the form of deification. It granted approval for the elevation of almost all things. Earlier, people deified

only nature and her phenomena but later on deification came to be regarded as a universal process.

In spite of this vast growing concern and improved techniques employed in retelling, only some considerable stories show the uneasiness to exist independently. While dealing with myths and mythologies, there are certain ways to consider as far as their multi-functionalism is concerned. Since myths and mythologies are the representatives of a culture, they cannot be uni-dimensional and both tend to evolve over time and centuries. Though mythical retellings are thought to be unfounded and arbitrary inquest, they engage in multiple comprehension through rational systematization, for they are often transmitted by the revisionist tampering of both political and cultural interventions. Precisely, these terminologies and techniques concerning mythology are somehow on account of its relation to literature and life. Perhaps these divergences among the theories in mythical retellings might be the cause for the contemporary authors' attempt to drift it promiscuously, dealing with the same theme under different conditions.

The roots of mythical retellings in Indian literary narratives can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. The Indian author M.T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham* is a 1984 Malayalam novel widely attributed as his masterpiece. The work got translated into multiple languages including English as *Second Turn* (1997). The novel is the epic retelling of the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Bhima, the second among Pandavas. The story which is devoid of divine elements deviates from the traditional

Mahabharata story and presents a realistic representation of the characters and events. Like any other retelling, it widely establishes the fact that religion is a tool similar to any other tool based on whoever handles it. Besides, epics have always been a platform to tell subjective truth irrespective of its reality and falsity. It is the freedom of the author to write in his own way to convey the story.

Another path breaking series which marked the official announcement of mythological retelling is with the advent of Ashok Banker's seven volume *Ramayana series* in 2003. It is the epic retelling of the *Ramayana* that was written 3000 years ago. Now with mind blowing and brilliant imagination, Ashok K. Banker has reconstructed the epic tale for contemporary readers. Apart from Ashok Banker, Devdutt Pattanaik's prolific best sellers and innumerable works on mythology including legends, folklores, fables and parables, Amish Tripathi's fastest selling book series in Indian publishing history, Chitra Banerjee Divyakaruni's new excavations in mythology, Ashwin Sanghi's mythological thrillers with theological themes, Amruta Patil's lovely and elegant graphic texts, Kavita Kane's exquisite portrayal of the overlooked minor women characters and Anand Neelakandan's vanquished and the mythological villain characters are examples for contemporary social critique of everyday life and culture.

Television narratives on the other hand celebrate the re-visioning of Indian mythology with visually appealing character portrayals. Its beginning was marked by Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* which is an Indian historical drama epic television series which telecasted during 1987-88. This series

introduced the audience to the notion of Hindu epics. Later on this series got elevated to the status of a national classic. It had 78 episodes with a running time of 35 minutes. It was almost during the same year that yet another epic series, *Mahabharata* consisting of 94 episodes got aired on DD National. It was directed by B.R. Chopra's son Ravi Chopra. Soon after, different series of the same epics came into being.

Both mythological themes and theological symbolisms aid the directors to create and propagate concepts related to post-colonial situations while reconstructing the epics. Apart from these mythological television serials, several animated films and series came into being contributing much to the Indian literary market of mythology. All these revisions found critical acclaims and took concerned freedom with the source text and gradually made a start for the emergence of pluralities. These different manifestations of the core ideas and concepts have also been expressed in multitude in heterogeneous regional languages and cultures. In addition to this, ballet and masked dance drama performances are also available in different artistic media.

This thesis entitled "Breaking Barriers: Retelling Indian Myth and Legend in Select Literary and Television Narratives" attempts to delve deeply into the realms of mythical retellings intending to discover the crucial aspects of contemporariness when it comes to the everyday life and culture of the common mass. The research brings to light these hidden notions and apprehensions behind such mythical retellings on the basis of the time and place in which it is created and recreated.

The study is also an endeavor to find out innumerable ways and perceptions in which a story can be fictionalized so as to make the ‘other’ part come to the forefront. Besides, it also carries the audience through the journey towards the vanquished, marginalized and the overlooked with the object of breaking the socio- political, cultural and hierarchical distinctions that had been acting as an ever existing obstacle to the compilation of different castes, class and culture. This research looks into the different aspects in which barriers are broken, when the once consecrated figures move closer to the human beings from their holy abodes as one among them.

This research work maps and makes a systematic record of the diverse reworked Indian myths and legends available in contemporary literary and television narratives and analyses their role in the blurring of several cultural and sociopolitical boundaries. It also throws light on how these remapped mythological texts function to direct individuals to reformulate their societal behavior and address current social issues in India. Besides, the work reviews the contemporary and futuristic inclinations in the reworking of mythology and the cultural overtones in mythical recasting. The texts selected for the study in literary narratives include Anand Neelakandan’s *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, Amruta Patil’s *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* and Kavita Kane’s *Menaka’s Choice* and the television narratives cover animated and performed films and series with a special focus to the *Bal Ganesh* series.

With his debut novel *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* (2012) Anand Neelakandan has been chosen as ‘one of the six most remarkable’ authors of

2012. Both his *Asura* and *Ajaya* are stories narrated by the defeated-‘the other side’ of the epics. This ‘other’ prospect enthralled the author to tell the story from the point of view of the vanquished. The same *Ramayana* epic is told from the perspective of the other side for he does not rely on absolute good or evil. What draws him to mythology rather than other mainstream genres is his love for Indian mythology. He also knew that his research on the ‘other’ has to be scrupulous while dealing with the thousands of years of old stories which has got great religious importance among crores and crores of people. Hence it was laborious while telling it from a different angle, rather than the conventional style. The story stretches out through Ravana and Bhadra- who is an epitome of the forgotten everyday man of India and the subject of both Rama and Ravana.

The author of the graphic novel *Adi Parva: Churning of the ocean* (2012), Amruta Patil has enumerated epics in copious forms imparting into a distinct proportion to the tradition of graphic novels in India. She has got a free flowing visual style of her own. Patil’s work is pregnant with recurring themes such as gender, sexuality and myth along with the concept of the story teller who passes down the infinite thread of stories over generations. She is the recipient of Nari Shakthi Puraskar from Pranab Mukherjee, India’s thirteenth President for “Universal Work that Breaks Boundaries” in art and literature.

Adi Parva is the first part of her duology graphic novel series *Parva* which is based on the *Mahabharata*, the Puranas and the tradition of Sutradhaars. Majority of the work’s narrative threads have been taken from the

classic work *Vishnu Purana*. First published in English by Harper Collins in 2012, *Adi Parva* has a setting that stretches over heaven and earth alike with characters beautifully presented from both heaven and earth in a more realistic and traditional mode. Patil's approach to the epics was through mythical comics and graphics and as she grew up, she started exploring the impulses and purpose behind each character's undertakings. Her novels are rich in colours along with her symbolic panels that speak about the mood swings and scenes.

Kavita Kane, known for writing mythology fiction is an author of the new era of retelling. All of her books are based on Indian mythology. *Karna's Wife* (2013), her debut novel was a best seller and this was followed by *Sita's Sister* (2014) which talks about the most overlooked character in the Ramayana, Urmila. *Menaka's Choice* (2015), yet another best seller, is based on the famous and enigmatic apsara Menaka and the powerful rishi Vishvamitra. Her fourth book named *Lanka's Princess* (2016) is based on Ravana's sister Surpanaka. *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* (2017) is a story of Sathyavati Kali Matsyagandha, the queen of Hasthinapur.

Every book of Kane basis its characters on the most overlooked figures from the Indian epics. The feministic attributions and the feminist revivalist notions that she has given to her novels made her a revolutionary force in Indian mythical writing. She always believed that mythology can be made into a huge canvas for contemporary thought. Her attempt was mainly to show the readers that even mythology has become a victim of patriarchy. Kane

knew that no mythology would ever glorify the deeds of a woman or bring forward a woman to speak against any of the mainstream male characters. This is mainly because every mythology has been succumbed to the fetters of patriarchy.

The television narratives chosen include a brief description of varied mythological television series, films and performed versions of it and animated films and film series in addition to the detailed study of *Bal Ganesh*, directed by Pankaj Sharma. It is a computer animated film in 2 series that carries the audience into the worlds of both reasons and beliefs. The first part which was released in 2007 is a dazzling animation film on Lord Ganesh's childhood about his adventures and pranks along with his rat companion Mooshak. *Bal Ganesh 2* is the sequel to the first part and got released in 2009. It explores new adventures of little Ganesh and the visit of some rats to the house of their friend to exchange stories of Ganesha. The film also depicts how he rose to the rank of gods.

Rather than seeing mythology as a realistic and imaginative rendering of the past, it is more alleged to be the significant heir of what constitutes the present for it goes beyond culture, religion and nation. Also, the writers firmly believed that there is no fun in knowing only one side of the story by intentionally hiding the other part of it that constitutes the women, marginalized and the overlooked ones. Hence the widespread of mythology and the advent of its retelling have gradually formed themselves into a super culture. Along with that, retellings shape those scattered uncertainties in the

existing conventional dogmas and remodel it based on the life situations of each individual. Moreover, it has undergone metamorphosis eventually. This process of metamorphosis has led to the breaking of distinct blockades existed in the ancient social constructions of reality.

As mythologies' reworkings are basically meant to show how certain mytho-religious themes, symbolisms and metaphors work in these contemporary constructs they have already crossed its religious borders, in order to inculcate many other varieties of the same kind. These popular works of art, born out of certain fundamental questions and thought process mainly target heterogeneous audience across the nations. They take the audience to the path they need to and with the help of its narrative style and characterization, these tellings make the people reflect themselves upon their own life and the happenings of the present time. In addition, they also enhance the portrayal of the wants, dreams, oppressions and fears of its spectators.

Such tellings, which explore for ways to break through real or imagined boundaries, frequently correspond to real-life circumstances aimed at bringing the excluded in. These excluded categories could be any backgrounded group or individual who yearns to be inhabited in their own bodies, who longs to get connected with their own existence, and who craves to be recognized as an individual free of social limitations. Hence, on the verge of including the excluded, these re-readings are at the brim of reconstructing a situation, in which everyone's story is heard and noticed.

The research looks into the literary narratives of Anand Neelakandan (*Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*), Amruta Patil (*Adi Parva*) and Kavita Kane (*Menaka's Choice*) and the television narratives to probe into how certain shackles are broken while fictionalizing mythology. The thesis contains seven chapters including an Introduction and a Conclusion. Chapter I, “Rephrasing Indian Mythical Narratives in Popular Culture” introduces the topic and title of the thesis, history and roots of mythologies, the beginning of retellings, the need of different tellings, and significant literary devices, tools and techniques employed in mythological retellings. Apart from that, the chapter explores notions regarding the evolution of such practices and their applications in numerous forms. The chapter also introduces the literary as well as the television narratives chosen for the study and the respective authors of the works.

Chapter II, “Unveiling the Unsung Hero”, deals with Anand Neelakantan’s *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* in the light of the hypothesis. Chapter III which is titled “Respacing Feminine Identity and Consciousness” details the analysis of Kavita Kane’s *Menaka's Choice*. Chapter IV, named “Oscillating between the Ancient and the Modern” talks about Amruta Patil’s *Adi Parva* and Chapter V “Mythical Mediatization through Television Narratives” expounds mythological television narratives and their retellings in the light of culture’s mediatization. Chapter VI concludes the work by elucidating the contemporary significance and role of retellings in reconstructing and re-structuring those pre-existing realities of the past by overcoming certain iniquitous barriers. In addition, there is a chapter entitled

'Recommendations', Chapter VII, the last chapter that deals with the scope and other possible areas of research in this field.

Chapter II

Unveiling the Unsung Hero in

Asura: Tale of the Vanquished

The story of the *Ramayana* has been told innumerable times. The enthralling story of Rama is known to every Indian. And in the pages of history, as always, it is the version told by the victors that lives on. The voice of the vanquished remains lost in silence (Neelakantan, 506)

Anand Neelakantan, the distinguished Indian author who created the counter-mythology genre in Indian literature, works on subversive and thought-provoking subjects. He had a fascination for the epics, especially the *Ramayana* and his curiosity to know more about the world of the asuras and their dynasty gradually gave birth to the author in him creating the story of Ravana and his people backgrounded since time immemorial. Hence 'Asurayana' (story of Asura- ('ayana' means story in Sanskrit)), an exceptional counter for the *Ramayana* was born. His work *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* became the story of Ravana, of asuras, of the vanquished, of the marginalized and of the minor and irrelevant characters of the epic.

Neelakantan has authored five novels in English and one in Malayalam, all based on the Indian epics *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. *Asura :Tale of the Vanquished* was his maiden venture, followed by the *Ajaya* series, *Ajaya- Roll of the Dice* and *Ajaya- Rise of Kali*. The former is a

2013 novel based on the 'kauravas' of the *Mahabharata* narrated through the perspective of Duryodhana. The latter is a 2015 novel, a sequel to the first. *The Rise of Sivagami* (2017) his fourth creation is a prequel to the Rajamouli film *Baahubali : The Beginning*. This retelling is based on the subalterns. *Vanara, The Legend of Baali, Sugreeva and Tara*, his fifth book tells the story of those perished and lost 'vanara' tribe (the monkey men) focusing mainly on the tale of Baali, Sugreeva and Tara and is a 2018 mytho fictional narrative. *Pennramayanam* (2019), his first mythological fiction in Malayalam chronicles the story of three women characters of the *Ramayana*- Meenakshi (Soorppanaka), Santa (Rama's sister) and Sita.

All his books deal with the lives of the defeated, following a similar pattern of voicing the 'Other' side. Their stories are narrated in such a way that they seem to contradict the habitual and typical legendary tales narrated from the perspective of the heroes. Neelakantan's novels speak about with realistic possibilities based on a rigid thought mechanism. He held that as almost ninety percent of the stories in India have not yet been put down into words, there is wide scope for further tellings. Hence he finds possibilities in drawing inspiration from these folktales to build narratives with modern attributions that would hopefully meet the needs of the common folks.

Neelakantan's work with television keeps him connected with the popular mass. Hence, well aware of their need for stories and fictional narratives, he has scripted episodes for serials such as *Siya Ke Ram* (Star Plus), *Sankatmochan Mahabali Hanuman* (Sony TV), *Chakravartin Ashoka Samrat* (Colours TV) and *Adaalat 2* (Sony TV). He sensed the changes that crept into

the language of the popular by means of the visual experience he has gone through, resulting in the creation of narratives choosing to write a narrative on Ravana making him voice for the first time. An unusual tale absolutely different from the point of view of the victors, he studied Ravana and this deep insight made him seek an alternative version of the traditionally established and recognized narratives.

As Indian mythology has long been dominated only by the stories of heroes and is known after those winners and warriors, the defeated and the so called 'villianous' characters often got buried in the abyss of the mainstream. Neelakantan's epic retelling of the *Ramayana* titled *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* is his tactic of foregrounding the marginalized groups, making them the heroes. The bi narrative style he has experimented made this novel intriguing, far from being a monotonous chore.

A perusal of *Asura*, showcases it as a realistic representation of Ravana rather than associating him with indomitable powers. Hence Ravana and his empire are portrayed as those defeated entities, silenced deliberately, as a means to bring into limelight names of the victors written in gold in the pages of history. Neelakantan's road to literary career was definitely a road that many of the authors never dared to take, explaining why the subaltern figures were provided with a voice of their own in his novel. Hence the wide recognition of his 2012 book *Asura* earned him undying fame and distinction.

The novel progresses through the subcontinent of ancient India and its territories carrying along the popular mass towards its setting and characters.

As one perceives, they are no more revered or God like figures but are mere tribes with human traits. The novel neither glorifies nor vilifies either Rama or Ravana. Instead it provides a voice for the asuras, the vanquished, especially Ravana, the villainous figure ever in the epic texts. Though there are narratives which totally subvert the ancient mythological and conventional traits by totally dismissing the concept of divinity, this work of Neelakantan was an exceptional deviation from that of these usual ones.

Though *Asura* makes Ravana the hero, he is not the typical hero that the readers expect. Instead, he is yet another despotic ruler who by all violent means usurps the power and throne from his half-brother Kubera. Instead of being righteous, scrupulous, pious and invincible, Ravana tends to be more of a tyrant, vicious and an oppressor. But in certain walks of life, he is depicted as solicitous and tolerant. On the other hand, Rama is a forbearing figure who is often confined and led by the norms and rules of the country. *Asura* indicates that Ravana too had a story to tell as he had been silenced as a loser. This narrative made the asuras speak for the first time ever in history. Inculcated by other relevant subplots, *Asura* sways within the torments of the perished and their succumbing to terrible fate.

Here, Rama is depicted more like an ordinary man with almost all the traits of a normal human being devoid of all sorts of special powerful weapons and magical powers. Ravana too is not depicted as an evil demon with black witches surrounded by 'bhoodas' with him to assist in the destruction of everything that hinders his way from doing whatever he wished to. No god is detailed here with showering beams of light as blessings. Instead, all the

figures are reproduced as human entities having all sorts of sensations and sensitivities. Each character speaks for a particular clan or creed. Apart from this, the godly figures such as the Indra, Maya, Varuna, Brahma, Mahabali, and Prasurama portrayed here are not lords with magical potentialities and celestial faculties but men with certain commanding powers. The battles they fought were not spiritual and mighty with heavenly indulgence but terrific and disastrous with aggressive intentions. The narrative's focus was mainly on those incidents that were hidden from the readers. The novel also discloses that Ravana was not the only one who craved for a voice of his own, but certain other subaltern and minor figures too craved for an identity of their own.

Asura could also be read as a critique which challenged the traditional mindset regarding the thwarted 'other side'. But the epic that is available to every Indian unfurls the story of victory and the victors. The story of Rama had been written and rewritten many times. But the story of Ravana, or of losers in general have never been told. *Asura* on the other hand announces to the world that the time has come where the dead and the defeated speak for themselves. It is the tale of the vanquished and the repressed Asura folk, a story which no Asura has dared to tell until now. Ravana in *Asura* sets up his story as follows.

For thousands of years, I have been vilified and my death is celebrated year after year in every corner of India. Why? Was it because I freed a race from the yoke of caste- based Deva rule? You have heard the victors' tale, the *Ramayana*. Now hear the

‘Ravanayana’, for I am Ravana, the Asura, and my story is the tale of the vanquished (6).

The novel endorses a narrative style where both Ravana and Bhadra chronicle the episodes in chapters alongside. Bhadra is the everyday human being who is symbolic of the insignificant and overlooked characters who has been destined to live under suppression. He is doubly marginalized both as a vanquished asura and as a subaltern asura. Though he has proved himself to be significant in many ways at many times, he has never appeared in public or in the forefront. He always remained as an unknown figure both for Rama and Ravana. Bhadra is thus the other narrator who shares the narrative with Ravana. Hence the whole reading has been established from the mind sets of Ravana and Bhadra. The words of Bhadra depict how their clan had been reeling under the heels of both Rama and Ravana for he is the ‘everyday man’ who awaits for a better world in vain.

Purposefully removing every divine aspect of the *Ramayana* story, *Asura* is narrated alternatively by Ravana and Bhadra. The novel begins with the terrible atmosphere of a bloody battlefield where Ravana lies down badly injured. The entire story is modeled on a flash back where the wounded Ravana starts it by narrating his part of the tale from the battlefield. He begins with his childhood, then the early torments, his explosive growth and uprising, his overthrowing of his half-brother Kubera to claim the throne of Lanka, the abduction of Sita, the arrival of Deva group led by Rama to the territory of the asuras, their coming to grips with and the demolishing of the Asura empire,

burning of the cities and their kingdoms, Ravana's downfall and finally the death of Bhadra, the silent sufferer.

I am a non-entity- invisible, powerless and negligible. No epics will ever be written about me. I have suffered both Ravana and Rama- the hero and the villain or the villain and the hero. When the stories of great men are told, my voice maybe too feeble to be heard. Yet, spare me a moment and hear my story, for I am Bhadra, the asura and my life is the tale of the loser (39)

Both Ravana and Bhadra take the readers towards different subplots, places and characters. The fictional accounts of the narrative, emotional profiles of the characters, historical background of the events, and dramatic presentations of the episodes made the narrative free from that stereotypic presentation of the stories. The novel brims with incidents from numerous other versions of the *Ramayana* story defying those preset traditional notions and convictions.

When it comes to the 'Other' side, Indian mythologies are often tuned to be single faceted essentially neglecting any sort of representation regarding them. Almost all sacred mythological stories celebrate only those glorious episodes of any incident by completely immersing the dark snuffed out aspect of those underdogs and the crushed. But *Asura* could simultaneously handle the 'other side' by mutually balancing both Ravana and Rama. They were depicted as rulers belonging to two entirely different cultures of 'Asura' and

‘Deva’. Besides, *Asura* makes the readers brood over every aspect of human life and helps to perceive the story through every possible angle.

Asura being a remarkable reconstruct from the point of view of Ravana, speaks for the silenced entities and interweaves religious thoughts and historical attributes by employing an unusual diversion, pulling out all the stops to provide the narrative an independent existence, on the basis of the contradictory convictions employed in it. The novel questions several dogmas and taboos based on the tragic episodes of social inequity and discrimination. The narrative’s varied epical interpretation mirrors contemporary adversities and this resulted in its mass appeal. Ravana’s misdeeds in the novel correlate certain contemporary political instabilities and at the same time his voiceless ‘Other’ exposes the mishaps of the victims.

The purpose of *Asura* was to empower the voiceless by deconstructing the prefixed image of a typical and perfect hero. Its literary potential reaches every nook and corner of the rooms of the subdued ones and brings them to the forefront. The narrative’s innovative endeavors bear productive output in the form of rational cognition. Apart from that, the narrative reconsiders each individual of every public sphere as a separate entity while addressing them. This novel has perpetuated its potential of being a realistic narrative in influencing the masses. This significant advancement of the novel is no less prudential than any complete reconstruction of the same kind.

Asura seems to be exposing realities beyond one’s perception. Its mode of presentation and language breathed life to the creation of an unconventional

hero. *Asura* neither defends Ravana nor defies him but speaks about him and makes his voice heard. This pluralism in epical reconstructions has led to the advancement of multiple significations and subtle cues regarding issues of gender, caste and class and this attempt could creatively bring out an ever hated figure alive before the audience. Besides, the narrative has ventured to edify those irreverent practices of enslavement based on social and economic marginalization.

The novel takes the readers to all quarters of the Rama and Ravana episode of the ancient epic based on the stories and historical data obtained through the ancient scriptures. It invites the readers to the bloody and strewn battlefield of the Lankan city where Ravana, his brothers, his subjects, and even their enemies lay scattered amidst the smoky embers of his beloved empire. The atmosphere is filled with the stink of putrid flesh and blood, raucous and eerie howls of the jackals, wild squeaking of the bandicoots, wheezy grunting of hungry vultures, uproarious laughter of the monkey men (vanaras), the blazing of the withering fire and the loud guffaws of the victors.

Tomorrow is my funeral. I do not know if they will bury me like a mangy dog or whether I will get a funeral fit for an Emperor-an erstwhile Emperor. I can hear the scuffing sounds made by the jackals. They are busy eating my friends and family. Bandicoots. They conquer the battlefields after the foolish men have finished their business of killing each other. Nothing matters now. I will pass out soon. The pain is excruciating. My beloved Lanka is being destroyed (9).

Ravana has come a long way struggling, suffering, fighting and winning. His early struggles, twinge of love and stings of abandonment, rifts in relationships, battles and wars, rape and abductions, marriage and family, defeat and death are narrated by Ravana himself, his perspective of this life which is more effective than someone else narrating it. Till day his story was narrated by many who have never ever been part of his life. His narration will be perfect only if he is given a chance to disclose his stories. No other person can narrate it as perfectly as he can. No victor can exquisitely narrate the sufferings of the loser unless they stand in their soles.

We were dragged out of court and dumped outside. The state has no use of us anymore. Our bones were broken and our internal organs damaged. So we were discarded like gnawed chicken bones. Chewed out by the state. Then the first stone hit me. Soon it turned into a hail. My people were stoning me for sending my old uncle to hard labour. Their impotent wrath was falling on two teenagers (77).

Bhadra is the doubly marginalized loser and the silent sufferer who represents the insignificant subaltern. Along with Ravana, *Asura* also made the subaltern asuras speak for themselves through Bhadra. Though both belonged to the same Asura clan, Bhadra has been haunted by the atrocities of being a slave to the upper class asuras and his suffering was no less than death. He was not the only subaltern who craved for his version of the story to come out but there were other marginalized unknown entities too who longed for a 'room of their own' and a voice of their own. Bhadra is symbolic of the commoner who

even fears to dream and have ambitions. He is the representative of the poor man devoid of the basic needs, of the farmer with no land of his own, of the servant who gradually becomes the slave, of the defeated warrior, of the breadwinner who failed to succeed in life, of the wretched who lacks a voice of his own, of the impoverished and so on. So Bhadra is the epitome of all sorts of ruins, defeats, tortures, enslavements, spoils, subjugations and setbacks.

I was neither a great fighter, nor a great organizer. Short, plump, with short hands, I am just an ordinary man. Just like a vegetable vendor, the bullock cart man, peddler in the market, or even the washer man, I am a nobody. I do not have a steely glare and arching brows. I had another name earlier in my life, but now I am known only as Bhadra. I never had large ambitions (43).

Bhadra's role in *Asura* was to create and maintain a balance throughout the story. He was the one chosen to perceive the story from a third person point of view rather than Ravana himself narrating the entire plot which prevents the story from being monotonous. Ravana makes a self-justification of himself and his empire, through his narrative. Bhadra's lifestyle and life situations remain the same, whether he is ruled by Rama or Ravana. He is a loyal servant both to Rama and Ravana. Bhadra is the sole well-wisher of the state and has always been a helping hand in the establishment of the empire. He was there with Ravana serving him until his last breath. This man is

symbolic of every human striving hard to earn a living amidst atrocities, discriminations and oppressions.

Unlike those retellings that focused only on the heroes or the minor characters of the epics, *Asura* created an urge in its readers to grope in the darkness hoping to see at least a feeble ray of possibility in getting into the lives of the vanquished. The novel is a manifestation of play of the shadows for nothing can remain for ever in darkness and light since the concept of dark and light is temporary based on the angle in which the light falls. Every story, incident, event or situation has got two sides, like the two sides of a coin. And these sides too vary based on the angle at which one perceives. Be it the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana*, they were all structured on a uni dimensional perspective and were single sided and had only a single point of view when it comes to the 'other'.

The character of Ravana, and other overlooked asuras have facilitated a provision for basing their narratives on the platform of the muted group theory (MGT), created by Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener. This communication theory that pays special attention to how marginalized groups are muted and kept out by means of the use of language, power, harassment and control has opened up regions of 'space' for these aforesaid characters. Neelakantan has developed stories of their own that reflected the malleability of the epics and enabled the outset of various domains for a whole new genre inculcating the marginalized and the vanquished groups. Here the revisionist use of language serves him better than those employed in the epics.

Ravana and his clan's muteness is a conspicuous instance of their inability to express themselves. The epic narrative which showcases the relationship between the dominant group devas and their subordinate asuras gets redefined and recreated here and the characters and events get expanded upon via subverting the dominant group's sole authority in the formulation of the language system, social norms and vocabulary. The members from the subordinate group, the asuras and the marginalised being like Bhadra found it tiresome to learn and use the dominant language to express themselves. Thus, in documenting their life and experiences, the epic texts failed to detail them properly and it ended up only in the erosion and distortion of the images of these vanquished groups.

As the dominant group ignores the voice of the marginalized group and addresses only their part of the story, the latter's story gets overshadowed in history and is forced to lead a submissive life as a result. This recreation of a new Ravana by Neelakantan cuts across individual limits between different hierarchical, cultural and socio-political boundaries. The novel also mirrors how muteness made them overlooked, subdued, and invisible and forced them to articulate in a language that would meet the dominant group's vocabulary.

This relatively modern construct of the vanquished mythical characters taking rebirths in different tellings have now become a new form of mythology in itself. Such rethinking paves the way for the framing and reframing of old beliefs on a philosophical basis and enables them to deviate considerably from the angle of conventional perceptions that trivialize them. The tacit awareness that there are dominant and non-dominant groups within a society is

the basis for muting or silencing. As a result, the muting process requires a shared understanding of who is in power and who is not. Thus the "oppressor" and "the oppressed" are the result of power imbalances. And that is how Ravana and his clan became the oppressed. The process of muting takes place in several forms. One such form portrayed in the case of Ravana is that of silencing. In the case of Bhadra, it is control and harassment.

The subaltern asuras' forced muteness points to the condition of social exclusion or social marginalisation, which displaces an individual or community to the fringe of society. They are denied individual rights, economic opportunities, social position and necessary resources that are normally available to members of the elite class, and which are fundamental to social integration. This very exclusionary form of discrimination results in their alienation from social class, race, skin colour, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, educational status, childhood relationships, living standards, and or political opinions, and appearance.

As marginalisation is a dynamic notion that questions the portrayal of certain individuals around the world, they are completely ruled out based on the features they exhibit that break the mainstream's established system of societal beliefs and norms. As a result, these marginalised ones represent groups with their own cultural standards and regulations that are distinct from mainstream standards and practices.

Asura investigates these historically oppressed and stigmatised groups based on class, caste, sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity and religion, revealing

the privileged system that only reinforces the superiors' narrative. It generates a universal discourse concerning marginalised voices, their perceptions and consciousness, as these deformed images of the defeated get bound in the system of the privileged. Hence their voices, thoughts, and identity become expressive renditions of certain aberrant cultural norms based on which they are demarcated.

Bhadra is the everyday man who deviates considerably from the perceived norms of the society and the community he belongs to. He is thus subjected to subtle forms of social exclusion and *Asura* also paints the outcome of social exclusion through the voice of Bhadra and Ravana. It is the narrative of affected individuals and communities who are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social, and political life of the society in which they live. And this retelling is a critique of the power of resistance in the form of demonstrations, protests or lobbying from the excluded people. This process' psychological impact on a particular community is well explained as,

Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live (Byrne, 3).

The narrative's theoretical approach to social exclusion has prioritized an individual or group's insufficient access to social rights, material deprivation, limited social participation and a lack of normative integration

when it comes to the crucial dimensions of their existence. Each instance of social exclusion that is evident in *Asura* is a combined result of unpleasant experiences, gender discrimination, sexual inequalities, political instability, social issues, economic crises, racial oppression, identity constraints, demographic conditions, forced labour and so on. Hence *Asura* chronicles the tale of that marginal man, whose

fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic culture his mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and, either wholly or in part, fuse. Isolation is common to almost every vocational, religious or cultural group of a large city. Each develops its own sentiments, attitudes, codes, even its own words, which are at best only partially intelligible to others (Byrne, 6).

While Neelakantan talks about the conditioning of the entire Asura community based on social exclusion, he is actually referring to the societal changes in the whole of society that have ramifications for particular people or group who live in that society. This situation is essentially flexible, and it occurs through time, in the course of centuries, and such writings help determine the lives of those who are excluded and those who are not. Exclusion is a term employed here to describe how history treats and discrete the vanquished others.

Social exclusion is defined as multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods (Madanipour, 22).

The act of ‘othering’ which evolves out of the concept of social exclusion employs a language untouched by multiple socio cultural deprivations and racial injustices experienced by individuals and communities across the social fabric. The sketching of *Asura* recognises how marginalising, muting, discarding, alienating and segregating act as powerful tools for displacing one to the periphery.

As social exclusion prevents people from engaging in society's mainstream activities and gaining access to the same living conditions as the rest of the population, *Asura* identifies the levels at which these segregations operate. Hence the narrative is centred at everyday existence, individual identity, community integration and societal conditions. Regardless of how social exclusion is theorized or defined, *Asura* frequently conjures up images of inequities and violations throughout its narration. Hence the novel has an impact on people's lives as well as humanity's harmony and solidarity for this reworking throws light on how the dynamic process of being muted and excluded from any of the socioeconomic, political, or cultural systems influence a person's social inclusion.

In every community, there exist cultural groups that have traditionally been marginalised and denied entry to the mainstream. Ravana and his group's identity and reality are socially produced here, with the oppressors' language serving as a tool. His tale was never told, and he was forced to adapt to the dominant group's prevalent modes of communication.

Asura's quest for a realistic counterpart for *Ramayana* was genuine for the book made the readers firmly believe in Ravana and his capacity as a protagonist in offering huge potentialities to produce a narrative of his own. Instead of glorifying Ravana, the novel brought to light the untold version of him by letting him remain the same as before. Though there is a passing mention of his good deeds in some folktales, such stories about him are never ever disclosed anywhere especially in a platform where Rama has to be glorified for his 'incredible' noble and heroic deeds.

The narrative portrays the fact of how reality gets struck between the two extreme ends of good and bad. The novel holds that the best narrative would be the one written by the person who has experienced or gone through it. *Asura* encompasses a wide array of frequent incidents incorporating their life's miserable beginning, the deadly insults, gradual and successful overcoming, subsequent expeditions, imperial conquest, superior power, despotic but definite rule, aggressive encounters, terrible war and finally the awful and complete desolation.

Rather than sticking on to the concept of deification in portraying the characters of mythology, the novel's plot moved away from this traditional

portrayal and presented a real life Rama and Ravana of the same epic. The ‘devas’ and ‘asuras’ thus became just two groups belonging to two different castes. What *Asura* brought in was a more relatable deconstruction of the so called ‘glorious and splendid victory’ of Rama and his subjects over Ravana and his Asura empire. The novel could also create an ideally feasible and reasonable array of incidents and events leading to the victory of Rama through the life and defeat of Ravana. *Asura* also proved that each character in a story can offer an entirely different view of the events depicted in it.

Ravana’s portrayal as hero was never meant to defy Rama’s glory or showcase Rama as the real and shabby villain. Instead, it was to have an appraisal of the character Ravana. As each approach reinvents the story in itself in one way or the other, *Asura* becomes one such reinvention of the character Ravana, deviating considerably from the traditional presentation. It made the unsung hero speak for the first time along with making the least noticed everyday man as one among the narrators. This ‘other’ side was what many of the authors missed while aiming for multiple tellings and retellings. Rather than making further judgements or justifications for the so called ‘villain’, the novel made Ravana narrate everything again.

Every thought is combined with parallel thoughts having multiple sides. But the story is led by the compilation of these different arrays of thoughts. Both Ravana and Bhadra are related to each other in their existence. Ravana’s story is never complete without Bhadra and vice versa. It was their mutual narration that disclosed the vanquished Asura empire. Moreover, the novel relates the character of Bhadra to all traditions, cultures and time.

Asura also conveys a strong point, in fact a universal truth regarding the power of perception. The retelling stresses that, the circumstances of all sorts of events, the reality of every situation, the truth behind each guilt, the story behind every success and the after effects of all defeat is all a matter of perception. It is capable of changing anything upside down, no matter what genre it belongs to, no matter what form it exists in and no matter where it belongs to. Just a slight deviation from perception changes everything in a jiffy. Today's hero can be tomorrow's villain and a villain can be transformed into a hero too. Each telling can reveal the same character with different identities. After all, it is all about how one perceives it and how it is perceived.

Each telling is powerful enough to change the direction of the flow of incidents and at times is found to make provisions for an entirely different version, thus Ravana becomes the hero in *Asura*. To bring out the relevance of the characters, *Asura* has depicted their raw life as such without even attributing any of the divine qualities and powers they had possessed in the *Ramayana*. In short, both Rama and Ravana are very human in all their deeds, actions, emotions, practices, daily affairs, activities and behaviours. A chapter is dedicated to Ravana, dealing with the emotions associated with each of the ten heads he has, to convince the readers that Ravana too is one among all. This was *Asura*'s argument for the connotative ten heads of Ravana and the narrative claims that, after all Ravana is going to be a normal being in this novel.

Often it is the life and tales of great men that are chosen as topics for writing narrative fictions and stories. An ordinary human being like Bhadra

often gets ignored somewhere there in the dungeon. Bhadra being the commoner is the ever forgotten entity in the different tellings both in the genres of art and literature. Though he is a 'nobody' to be written about in books or stories, he is 'everybody', who can be traced in society. He is the 'nobody' who lives in everybody. That is how Bhadra is portrayed throughout the novel. Bhadra, like all other wretched and poor mankind, is the passive witness to many of the activities and happenings of the state and he is more like a puppet in the hands of many. This retelling has tried to bring Bhadra out of the segregations that have silenced him from his freedom of expression and speech.

Bhadra's voice has thus turned into a strong revolt against the violent social and feudal anarchy that has been suppressing him and his equals. Though Ravana and Bhadra share the same umbrella of the vanquished asuras, Bhadra's is entirely different from that of Ravana's. Though they are the ultimate losers, Bhadra has been marginalised both in the hands of Ravana and his subjects alike. He is marginalised by his own community too on the basis of class and labour. Apart from that Bhadra is also that downtrodden chap who has been denied the right to life. Only he can narrate the enslavement and treacheries that have been suffered by a helpless and penniless plebe of the slums like him. The novel's intention was to make Bhadra the bridge that connects his narrative to modern India. Bhadra is modelled on an ideal platform where everyone including the author is connected to him in one way or the other.

Mythological retellings are such that it resonate with every era, period of time and culture, irrespective of its age and narrative style. All tellings are rather symbolic of any of the social, economic or cultural aspects of the society and they deal with various issues too. A marginalised Bhadra or a vanquished Asura is thus born out of the fetters of social issues and practices. Valmiki, the author of *Adhyatma Ramayana* has pointed out that Ravana is an example of how a man normally lives and Rama as an example of how a man ought to live. So *Asura* holds that, there is a Ravana, hiding somewhere in everyone's mind. The characteristics exhibited by Ravana back then served as the foundation for the entire modern world. Ravana is easy to locate, but Ramas are hard to find today. Still, the epic *Ramayana* praised only Rama for being extra ordinary in all his deeds. He was glorified for his righteousness in keeping close to heart his policies. Though Rama has been an 'ought to be' character, each and every legend, myth, lore and story is still after him.

This retelling is a perfect answer to what the epics really missed while they were glorifying the victors, their life and deeds. The question regarding the purposeful negligence of Ravana, such a strong counterpart of Rama has been hovering in the minds of many. This is not the case of Ravana only but also the case of most of the losers in epics. No poet has ever sung about them, nor has any writer ever written about them. No reporter has ever made a write-up on them and no person has ever had an urge to know about them throughly or elaborately. They have been remained totally forgotten entities from time immemorial. Dissatisfaction is what is causing the world to evolve. Ravana

was a perpetually dissatisfied individual. People would still be living in caves or on trees if everyone were satisfied.

Ramayana has always been one among those manifestos of divinity. The stories it renders and the characters it portrays are treated by many as part of their beliefs. So for those traditional believers it is always a part of their culture and it would be a matter of real concern when these stories get retold completely demythifying the divinity of their gods and goddesses. But retellings accept and affirm the truths of unique faiths and teach people to focus simultaneously on every possible aspect of reality and life and this is how *Asura* bridges the gulfs of marginalization. Hence aiming to rake up those elements of reality, gods are being portrayed as earthly beings deconstructing the supernatural elements and its interventions. Furthermore, they sought to expose the ancient culture and its impact on contemporary society in order to make the people figure out certain primitive mishaps from which they are desperate to come out. Moreover, most of the mythological narratives are not complete in order for the popular mass to contribute and participate in it.

Rather than mere perceptions and interpretations, these retellings are 'constructions' for they are the mythical developments of reality. As a result, the events get reconstructed themselves and are portrayed as having certain connotations from real life situations. Hence one cannot trace an erosion of faith in these texts, but an alternative explanation to all these conventions. Such works often stick on to reason and are the symbolic epitome of contemporary social practices. They modernize myths, not religion and are open to any sort of variations and additions. But the techniques or symbols

employed by the writers to transmit the basic notion behind each mythology remain the same.

Almost all the mythological texts are interpretive in nature and each interpretation sets at ease for contradictions. These contradictions later on got developed into its reconstructions. The reconstructed ones are again subjected for further interpretations and this plurality is not bound to divert from the subjective truth. Though there can be variations in the range of interpretations, they take the plunge for new facets in meanings and thoughts as the Indian view of life and its philosophical basis are extremely multi-dimensional. As these complex reconstructions expose the true intentions of these mythologies, their pointless deconstruction and the endless reworkings enable mythology to have a counter narrative to homogenize its diverse transfigurations. Most of the retellings aim to “unmask the mystique which kept the true intention of the narrative hidden from readers” (Richman, 92).

Mythological writers are on the verge to decenter gods and goddesses. Each retold version goes parallel with the epic, picturing the entire human condition that falls between mythology and mythical fiction. Hence, the different versions of the same classical epic become the different constructions of the same reality. Though there can be violent disagreements between different class constructions, they too generate a mutual understanding throughout with the help of “the language of the natural and the eternal” (Richman, 94). Each construction is different and culminates in the establishment of a novel way of presenting and creating mythical narratives.

Indian mythology is indeed complex and rich. As the interference of culture over the centuries has superimposed certain drastic changes in it, mythology started appearing as a spectacle of abundant stories and congregational practices. Many of the mythological stories seem to have been created for the man who has withdrawn from mundane life. But on a general plane, retellings have come forward to remove certain elementary exigencies of differences and distinctions for,

Hindu mythology, of course, has been in the safe keeping of upper caste men for the longest time. Written by them, interpreted by them, and commented upon by them, they become even more masculine in their traditions (Kriti).

Asura consisted of very highly developed stories from the *Ramayana*. Its pantheon purposely avoided an absolute center by discarding gods. The novel distributed the characters according to the purpose behind its telling and made its intentions and its telling's underlying speculations lucid through the fashion it is retold. Instead of being a sequel, *Asura* became the possible parallel of the epic. Furthermore the influence of Orientalist culture and its remarkable shifts have also contributed much to the plurality of Indian mythology. Gradually they got shaped, polished and rebuilt in entirely different forms suitable for each country and even state within the country.

The mythical stories available today have been created and developed by many authors. By the time these stories are put into words, it gets merged with individual authors' perceptions too. Also, with the passage

of time, those stories develop on the basis of cultural evolution and anthropology. Moreover, their rewriting has also been done by many authors. While there are more than three hundred versions of the *Ramayana* and thousand five hundred versions of the *Mahabharata* available at present, their origin and evolution cannot be traced and hence no version can be given the final authority of being the 'right' version. But the wide acceptance and the mass appraisal of such versions are an evidence for the fact that, as far as they incorporate rational thinking, people readily accept both the realities.

The major reason behind such retelling is that as T.M.P. Mahadevan, author, *Outlines of Hinduism* holds, "the richness, beauty and greatness of Hinduism, no doubt, lies in its spirit of accommodation"(79). So this open ended and accommodating capacity makes mythology rather liable for any change, fallibility and limitation. Still, these epics are added by notions related to culture, social upheavals of the present and the various apprehensions and speculations of the world ahead. These basic epic texts though have created several hierarchical as well as political differences and boundaries, their retellings united every aspect under a single umbrella. Hence this practice has gradually lead the way for the breaking of discriminatory obstructions resulting in the recognition and freedom of the denied groups.

Rewriting is not a foreign notion and practice as far as India's historical and cultural background is concerned. The country has been recreating and retelling its age old narratives for a long period of time. This practice of keeping the stories relatively tensile makes them alive

throughout and prevents them from being worn out. The very adaptive and productive capability of mythology is an evidence for having life in it. The significant advantage of these epics is basically their proficiency to get contemporised irrespective of time and space. Moreover, Retellings are modern narratives relating the old ones about the origins, traditions, creations, gods, kings and sages.

These ancient epics are reframed by multiple sects of people of different places and cultural groups. But the distinctions and varieties made by them can neither guarantee the ultimate truth nor can reject those traditional dogmas completely. The contemporary writers are directly concerned with the reframing of the Indian mythical stories on the basis of the rationale of the people. Moreover, they are experimenting on the mythological characters and portraying them as real life characters. Every mythological story in the epics moves from its static or idle condition when it gets reframed in retellings.

As far as new tellings are concerned, they have nothing to do with or contribute to the distorting authenticity of the thousands of years old cultural epitomes of the country. Rather, the genuine end of these tellings was to distort the prevailing supernatural dogmas and the irrational practices among the millions of people of India. Hence giving priority to the subjective truth and the multiple narratives retrieved from it, the narratives started telling the *Mahabarata* and the *Ramayana* and other mythological stories, in a fashion that has never been heard before. Hence these works incorporate multiple cultural renderings of the mythology as a sort of redressal of certain basic

fallible notions that have crept in due to the passage of the time. While dealing with reworkings, they inadvertently present certain ardent aspects and philosophy behind Indian mythology.

Instead of discussing about or glorifying a particular character, mythological renderings just tell stories about them. All the stories depicted in the retellings are reflections of the authors' own rationale and one has to find the main tenets where mythical retellings overlap with modern cultural practices, scientific approaches and fundamental thoughts. In fact, these current tellings provide the readers with a diverse array of significant insights. Moreover, such tellings enable the readers to deal with rational thoughts.

These mythical heroes and gods are divided into groups based on the culture, generation and time in which they are reconstructed. As a result, as time passes, these anthropomorphized beings become naturalized intending to instill public intervention. Naturalism is a philosophical view that all existence and all things come from natural phenomena involving one or more natural events. As a result, any supernatural or spiritual reason is ruled out, and every god portrayed here is a replica of the general public. These gods appeared to be stories about ordinary people because they were nature-oriented. Because naturalism arose from realism, it is presented in a genuine manner, with both Rama and Ravana living, suffering and feeling like any other man.

If one looks closely at the mythology's structuring, one may see a tendency for it to be orientated towards nature. The gods and goddesses, their

struggle, and their aspirations all point to a culture that values nature. This framing and positioning of Rama and Ravana is remarkably balanced, and they live among humans as equals. As a result, several versions of the same Ravana can be viewed in different contexts. Each interpretation is based on the insights gained from the activities and events of the current setting. As a result, this naturalistic propensity to de-mythologize the gods and legendary beings who populate the pages of the epics becomes increasingly interpretative, seeking for multiplicity in all of their attributions.

Mythologies as well as its retellings are not discoveries of any sort of theories or postulates. Rather, they are the endless quest for meanings and perceptions. They represent life and portray reality symbolically instead of being objective. Thus the gods are no more the sacral ones as before but the humanized entities. The concept of God has been decentered and the focus has been shifted to the popular mass. These stories encourage individuals to reflect on their own lives and current events and bring out the 'other' group with the help of their narrative style and humanized characters. These tales likewise seek to remove actual or perceived constraints, and they frequently correspond to real-life events.

Chapter III

Respacing Feminine Identity and Consciousness

in

Menaka's Choice

We make love and leave. That is our motto. Live by it, Menaka, or you shall suffer untold, unnecessary grief (Kane, 60)

Kavita Kane is popularly known for her expertise in dealing with mythology and its fictionalization. She often prefers to retell it from the perspective of the overlooked women characters or the woman counterpart of the male protagonist. Kane has authored new path breaks in literary retelling. She also has deconstructed the conventional patriarchy by overthrowing the traditional practices of positioning male protagonists in the mainstream. Her protagonists are all mythological women characters especially those unnoticed figures from various walks of life. She is often described as a revolutionary force in Indian mythical writing for she was the first to bring in feminism in mythology. Till then, mythology and mythical narratives had been dominated by certain patriarchal mores with only a few recognized women characters. Her fascination for the unnoticed, backgrounded fragile women characters fetched her fame of a feminist mythologist.

Kane experimented this new genre of feminist revisionism by creating a novel episode in contemporary reconstruction of mythology. This female

revisionist approach could bear new shoots of revival both in literature and mythology alike. The remarkable success of her debut novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* (2013) shortlisted her among the bestselling authors in mythological fiction.

Her *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* tells the story of the neglected hero of the *Mahabharata*, Karna through the voice of his wife, Uruvi. She is the recreated fictional character from the imagination of the author. Retold beautifully in a unique perspective, Kane brings in events leading to the great Mahabharata war. Uruvi is portrayed as a renowned 'kshathriya' princess who willfully chooses this 'sutaputhra' (Karna) over the other five 'kshathriya' brothers. She is the better half and the silent witness to all of Karna's desolate life and downfalls. Hence no person other than Uruvi can so beautifully breathe life to the character of Karna. This wonderful narrative of the *Mahabharata* chronicles the twist and turns in the life of Karna and how he became a puppet in the hands of fate.

Sita's Sister is her second novel (2015), which is narrated by yet another unnoticed character from the epic *Ramayana*, Urmila. She is the unfortunate wife of Lakshmana, an outspoken and overlooked being, born for silently suffering her pains. As Kane states, Urmila has also undergone fourteen years of exile and alienation, her own private loneliness. But the legend comprehended it as her sleep. This reality cum fictional version of the *Ramayana* throws light on the entire women characters apart from the story of Rama and Sita. While the epic completely avoided Urmila, Kane gave her

voice and allowed her to remain as defensive as she is. *Menaka's Choice* (2015) is her third book based on the story of the celestial beauty Menaka and her enticement of the rishi Viswamithra. It is a splendid narrative on how she rose to the standards of being a powerful woman by overturning the constraints. She has been portrayed as the epitome of female sexual power and self-identity.

Kane's fourth mythological fiction *Lanka's Princess* which was published in 2016 is a novel on the least discussed sister of Ravana, Meenakshi. She was once a fine and lovely princess. Now she is known as the ever loathed and the terrible ogress of Lanka- Surpanaka. When it comes to a discussion on the female characters of the epics, her name has never been considered to be fit for it. She has always been looked upon as a negative and insignificant figure having nothing to be spoken about. Kane's attempt was to depict the pathetic story behind Meenakshi's transformation into the present Surpanaka to the readers. Her mother Kaikesi was a demon while her father Vishrava was a 'rishi'. They were not fond of her as she was a girl and were always affectionate towards her brothers Ravana, Kumbhakarana and Vibhishana.

The novel makes Surpanaka speak about how pathetic it would be if one has to undergo mental transformations as a result of mental impairment and harsh treatment. She also speaks about the society's and parents' indifferent attitude towards girl children and their hapless plight. The incidents that led to the change of an admirable Meenakshi into a villainous Surpanaka,

the abduction of Sita and the death of Ravana have also been narrated in the novel. This novel was followed by *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, her fifth novel. It is a 2017 mythical fiction. The book is a splendid work narrated by the character Satyavati, the fisher girl of Hastinapur. It explores the story of Satyavati and her relationship with Shantanu.

Ahalya's Awakening is her latest book. This 2019 fictional retelling of the *Ramayana* story elaborates upon the version of Ahalya including the characters of Indra and Brahma. Ahalya has been the most beautiful and perfect creation of Brahma. She got married to Gautama who was much older than her. Once, Gautama found his wife sleeping with Indra (who came to Ahalya in the guise of Gautama) and cursed both of them. He turned Ahalya into a stone until she was restored by the stroke of Rama's foot over the stone. *Ahalya's Awakening* fleshes out this story of Ahalya by including a background story of Ahalya as a small girl who prefers studying to getting married. The book is a lovely narrative of the relationship between Ahalya and Gautama and that critical point of her adultery as far as a woman is concerned.

Though she was a victim of Indra's deceit and was not even given a chance to speak up. This quick transformation of a most devoted wife into a shameless slut is quite surprising and almost every version of her story followed this same plotline. Here, the novel celebrates not only the sexual awakening of the protagonist, but also her intellectual and spiritual awakening. The story is not a critique on love and fidelity in marital relationships. Instead it portrays how patriarchy can be overcritical in the life of an individual. The

novel also deals with the progress of the characters of Ahalya, Indra and Gautama.

Kavita Kane's *Menaka's Choice* unravels the story on the societal constraints and impositions in the life of an apparently helpless apsara, Menaka. The novel discusses how she breaks the restraints of sexual as well as forcible subjugations. Like other subdued female characters she too was denied of a voice of her own. She was meant only to conform and to be a subordinate to the cunning Indra who is a symbolic epitome of patriarchy. Menaka and other apsaras in general, were not given their own freedom of expression though they were heavenly blithes. The legends so comfortably dismissed their influence and gravity.

The ten year relationship of Menaka and Viswamitra and their devotion and loyalty in love became the theme of Kane's novel. The way the story was portrayed in legends was as if Menaka enticed Viswamithra and left their child. But Kane gave it a deviation in her own way and described Menaka as every woman striving to make 'her own little slice of heaven'. All her novels are titled to address the least discussed women characters and they are brought forth to get noticed by the public. Kane also attributed a new identity and power to her. This novel presented what type of woman Menaka was and the situations that made Menaka follow her own decisions. Most of the stories available on the 'apsaras' provided only a uni-dimensional presentation of them. Usually they are portrayed as beautiful seductresses. No epic has ever associated valour and sacrifice to them. But *Menaka's Choice* identified

Menaka's sexuality to be a matter of her personality and that was what made her unique.

Here the novel recounts the story of the heavenly beauty Menaka and the rishi Vishwamithra, stimulating the readers to rethink over the conventional thoughts and age old misconceptions over the least mentioned female characters. The choice Menaka takes in this fiction subverts the stereotypical notions associated with those similar fragile characters of mythology. "The seduction of Vishwamitra by Menaka is a small mention in our mythology. I was more interested in these two characters than just this episode in their lives" remarks Kane (Cris).

He wanted to be a rishi, the most enlightened one. He gave us the 'Gayathi Mantra'. However, he was an egotist and his cause for downfall was an apsara named Menaka. That she fell in love with the man she was sent to seduce and destroy is the greatest irony for both of them because she was his doom, as well as the one who brought him back his glory (Kane, 9).

The title's paradoxical ascription might make the readers brood over if Menaka really had a choice. The tale is carried in such a way that the readers cannot help thinking if it was Menaka's struggle against the choice less life she had to lead. The novel portrayed Menaka's life as a series of choices along with restrictions. Like all apsaras, Menaka too took her birth as an immortal celestial. She was entrusted to please and give pleasure but was not allowed to

go after it. She was also one among those nymphs. Among all apsaras, Menaka was the most coveted one, the gleaming beauty of heaven. Basically apsaras are termed as ‘celestial courtesans’ who are meant to arouse unwonted thought and extra ordinary creativity and artistry. They are yet fatal to whoever desired them. “They were the sparkle of the sunrise and the dimming of the sunset, the coolness in the breeze, the haunting echoes of the forests and fields” (10).

This rereading of the story of Menaka, the blithe nymph allows the readers to ponder what if a puppet like figure later on chooses not to be a stereotype of the traditional conventions. Providing a platform for those characters who had been kept at the bottom of the social ladder, the novel showers light on the reassertion of gender politics, delegation and identity. The book is all about Menaka, who had been silenced till now. It retells Menaka’s troubles and triumphs over the arrogant and unjust king, Indra. On the other hand, the novel is also the story of another king, Kaushik who voluntarily renounced his crown and kingdom to become one of the most revered rishis. And he is now known as Vishwamitra. The novel is a beautiful panorama of Menaka’s courtship with this rishi.

Kane's works are centered on mythological female characters, whom she frequently experiments with. Many reasonable features have been attributed to Menaka here and her beauty and intelligence, as well as her lucid portrayal, all led to the creation of a new Menaka. She is not just an aesthetically pleasing sumptuous nymphet meant for sensual indulgence, but a woman with a deceiving brain. She is aware of the circumstances and she manipulates and decides her own course of action. It is her story, of how a

game of hoodwinking becomes her life, of how her love is shattered by the colluding Indra, of her decision to renounce her happiness for the good of her husband and child and of her suppressed suffering.

Unlike almost all other authors of the fictional narratives of mythology, Kavita Kane's female characters are not those well discussed ones of the epics. They are nevertheless, not the epitome of astounding qualities and abilities. But despite being trivial, Kane's novels devote a whole narrative and speak out for them, creating a history of their own, critiquing all sorts of vanquishes they have been facing. Coming up with space for the images of the 'other' women, her novels show that mythology is teeming with various kinds of such characters.

The story begins with a prologue named 'Menaka's Daughter' in which Menaka's daughter Sakuntala is introduced. Thus it is through Sakuntala that the story of her mother Menaka is developed. The novel ends with an epilogue and the entire novel is centered in twenty six chapters. The book is a beautiful narration of the events that had taken place in the lives of Menaka and Vishwamitra right from the time of their meeting. This work of hers is entirely about the influence of Menaka, in the most powerful and virile rishi, Vishwamitra.

The novel introduces Menaka to the readers from her very birth from the milk ocean, during its churning. She is believed to be the daughter of Brahma, the creator. Soon after her birth, Indra claimed her for the heavens. He also wanted her to take up the role of a seductress, the temptress of

pleasure and lust, and to woo intelligently. Every apsara is constantly reminded of the fact that no apsara can claim their love but have to be in love. They are the nymphs of lust and desire, meant only to lure. The irony is that, no apsara has ever known what love is. They are not allowed to fall in love. It is from these strange yet imposed rules that the novel made Menaka break the fetters. The novel is named after Menaka's choice of either conforming to the norms of the Indralok or toppling down the shackles and leading a life devoid of any restrictions. The duty assigned to Menaka was to seduce the rishi Vishwamitra and to disturb his 'thapas' so as to captivate all his powers. Though Menaka was entrusted to woo Vishwamitra, she fell in love with him and his magnificent presence.

The story carries the readers to Menaka, her love Vishwamitra, their courtship, those unexpected happenings in their lives and how she dares to take those strictly forbidden paths of love, truth and loyalty. Apart from the traditional mythology, Menaka's rendition was exceptionally different from that of the conventional submissive figure. She has been portrayed as a strong woman having her own choice, her own freedom to choose and make her words come true. She made Indra lose everything including his kingdom, his pride and his wife. This could be one of the changes that retellings intended to bring in the lives of the traditional overlooked women characters. Gradually, mythical narratives became not just the telling of some age old tales of certain randomly assumed gods and goddesses, but of everyday man and his follies and fancies. In its mythical interpretation, the novel is all about a brave and bold woman's voyage to fulfill the duty assigned to her.

In this story of enticement of Vishwamitra, Menaka is presented with an extra ordinary competency and valiance. Though Menaka is one among those renowned seductresses of the heavens, nothing has ever been written about her. One can only find just a passing mention in the stories of the epics and legends. But Kane's writings brought out the so called fragile and tenuous characters to the frame. Hence this mythical narrative is an expedition to flesh-out the enormous strength and convictions possessed by Menaka.

Menaka's Choice is not just a manifestation of femininity, but an attribution of a justifiable position and individuality to the often subdued and neglected characters. It actually ascertains the real self to those characters who were not even given the opportunity to represent themselves as well. The novel also stresses on certain patriarchal dogmas that existed in ancient mythology and showers light on those unnoticed figures. Here, Indra is a representative of those misogynic and chauvinistic people who failed to admire these women's extensive power and stance.

This retelling of the epic *Mahabharata* focuses on how it would be if Menaka were given a chance and 'room of her own'. Each incident generates thoughts and enables people to think and ruminate upon it. Furthermore this voicing of these docile ones have brought in their inner strengths and prowess for any reader who wishes to see the unseen and hear the unheard. The novel's views are rooted in the adulation to venerate Menaka, capable of being remembered even after her death or ruin. Menaka also evokes a thought process that women have been always bound within strictures of the agency of men who authoritatively deny the ownership of her own body and identity.

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man then it is time for her to dislocate this ‘within’ to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of (Cixous, 76).

Contemporary mythologists employ these distorted and the hidden ‘other’ side in the ancient mythology to re-frame and make them free from discriminations and impositions. An instance of speech made by Indra to Vishwvasu and Menaka provides a clear cut idea regarding the rules imposed upon them.

This is Indralok, there are gandharvas and apsaras who love and make love but never marry! Both of you are available to anyone who has the strength to claim you-you have been made beautiful, young and immortal-but for the pleasure of everyone. Not just yours! There nothing like private marital bliss here, it doesn’t exist! How dare you break the rules! You know that in this heaven only erotic love can flourish and not personal romances! Yet you acted presumptuously and for that I pronounce.... (14-15).

In response to this, Menaka’s reply was unexceptional. She dared to break down the manacles of subjugation from the realization that she is no more a puppet in the hands of anyone. But these instances of valorous act could not be found in any ancient mythologies, since they conveniently

dismissed such events for the sake of patriarchy. But Kane has come forward with an excellent alternative to this by being essentially a historicist. Here, Menaka is portrayed in such a way to illuminate the distortions in those old mythical narratives. The following was Menaka's reply to Indra

I broke the boundaries set up by this world and favoured one man over others. I did it. I seduced him, because I wanted him! I fell in love. O king of devas, I couldn't help myself and I saw to it that Vishwvasu, your king of the gandharvas was besotted with me-not just to have him, but to own him, to keep him forever. For that, I committed the next unthinkable crime- I married him! Our passion was quenched but never died and to save ourselves, we got married! Again, it was my decision, but I did it for you, for the 'devas', for Amaravati....How could I make others happy if I was miserable? And so I married Vishwvasu so that I could stay happy, and keep all of us happy too (15-16).

Menaka feigned her helplessness before Indra regarding her marriage with Vasu. Menaka's victory was described as "she wanted to laugh aloud victoriously, but she reined it with a gracious smile. She had won her argument" (17). This lucid and gripping narration of the story of Menaka is not just a story of love and court ship, but her desperate attempt to create an identity by knocking down barriers of cultural and traditional dogmas. By simultaneously weaving fact and fiction, the novel has fleshed out characters

and events from their skeletal frame for the purpose of creating an authentic narrative about them.

Menaka is quite felicitous in her undertakings and words. She opens up her mind to establish her viewpoints without any hesitation. She is pictured as someone chasing her visions in a world of limitations. Kane adds, “the fact that they are being retold, revisited and re-visioned makes them so dynamic, universal and identifiable” (Thomas). So by placing these characters at the center, they get noticed, admired and registered. These disregarded, often unnoticed characters have their own tales to tell. Hence the aim of the narrative is to provide an alternative perspective without altering the plot, but the course.

Above all, Menaka was the most difficult character to sketch for she has not been portrayed in the legends as a fine character. Instead she has been presented as a consummate temptress who had no heartfelt love at all. Nothing much was spoken about her in any of the legends and lores though she needs no introduction. Why did she abandon her children? Why did she use her radiant beauty and fake love to destroy everything? All these questions remained unanswered in the minds of the people. Though not an ideal woman in the epic, the novel made her fall in love with the rishi she was intended to seduce and destroy. The novelist also made her the principal reason for the fall and rise of the powerful Vishwamitra.

The potential of myths in providing alternative yet symbolic significations as per space and time is remarkable. Hence it becomes the only genre that maintains a reasonable balance between absolute good and evil,

rationality and irrationality, real victors and losers, intense desire and despair and everyday life and death. Moreover, its primary and ultimate aim is to bring out the unfamiliar characters and their life, story and importance to the readers. Kane's selection of the characters does not follow any pattern or are not conscious. Instead, she chooses those lesser known characters that fascinate her by all means with their relative significance and individual uniqueness. The multilayers of interwoven threads present in the epics too enabled her to have her own tellings irrespective of the character's role in the mythology.

What keeps mythology alive from being dying is its narratives' capability of enabling symbolic representations, varied interpretations, fundamental philosophies, diverse perspectives, alternate angles, real life reflections, contemporary thoughts, modern sensibilities, and cultural practises. Kane explains "Even the smallest stories in our epics are fascinating, often linked and interweaved with other equally fascinating stories and it goes on, spinning a delightful web of stories, tales and anecdotes of human intricacies and relationship"(In Conversation). This open-endedness in incorporating any sort of reinterpretations, reconstructions, relevant thoughts and everyday realities make the narrative more than an ideological platform that provides subtle cues regarding ancient culture and history. Also, it makes its characters come out of the story space and their prefixed roles and identities.

The novel's portrayal of Menaka as a powerful and self-emancipated woman made her move out of her pre-existing position. She is presented as a

woman with exceptional perception and innate faculties in the novel. Menaka voices against domestic social constraints and male dominations. She travels throughout the narrative, interfering, commenting, opining, questioning and making decisions. This change in the identity of the characters like Menaka paved the way for the creation of narrative threads intertwined with multiple layers of alternative perceptions. Likewise, each character is a result of this atypical deviation from their roles and identities. These minor characters, especially the women started getting engaged with the world they live.

This fleshing out of the marginalised characters from the epics has been with regard to their traumatic life under pressure. They have been remaining constant throughout centuries. But the narrative could supply a creative canvas for contemporary thoughts and could make it a powerful paradigm for woman's collective consciousness. Rather than considering them as archetypes of subjugation, the novel resorted to have a slight change in the general attitude of humanity towards those forgotten characters.

It was Kane's feministic concerns that made her retellings a reaction against the conventional system of portraying the world through the eyes of males. Her concerns were not meant to demolish male heroism or to raise her voice and contempt against their traditional practises and systems. Instead, it was to show the world the reason for these female characters' marginalisation throughout the centuries. Hence the novel brought to light those grounds on which they have been oppressed and denied a voice of their own. The narrative also let them speak to the world, those unspoken and untold part of their life.

Besides, the characters unveiled through them the harsh realities behind their silence. This made the world realise how powerful they could be if they were given a space with essential reasoning, aspirations and resolutions.

India's mythology, epics, legends and lores have been offering stories with male characters as the centre. Though each and every retelling seeks out to revive the existing injustices and discriminations, they have never made an attempt to bring out the female characters to the mainstream. Though they have dealt with the marginalised and the voiceless characters, they have never made an effort to portray the hardships of such women who have been undergoing through the same situation.

While *Menaka's Choice* unravelled the will power and self-empowerment of Menaka, *Karna's wife* discloses Uruvi's potential as being a wife. A more reserved Meenakshi's significant and dramatic transformation to a despicable Soorpanaka and her emancipation is the crux of *Lanka's Princess*. *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* opens up the role and importance of Satyavati in molding the future of Hastinapur. *Sita's Sister* on the other hand posturizes Urmila as the owner of strong and willful determinations. *Ahalya's Awakening* presents an intellectually awakened Ahalya before the readers. All these five characters excel considerably in one way or the other.

These works could reflect female social and domestic issues, individual psyche, gender conflicts, instinctive reactions, personal strengths, physical weaknesses, strong opinions, emotional responses, sexual identities, significant roles and critical consciousness. Though certain narratives of the epics had

popular women characters notable for having strong will power and making staunch decisions, they were all shadowy figures in terms of their individual representations. But here, the protagonist is a mentally strong woman against all sorts of sentiments, emotions and limitations.

As far as regional literature is concerned, mythical retelling is not a novel concept or genre. In fact, regional literature has been witnessing mythological reconstructions even before they got set down into narrative forms. Rather than mere retelling of the mythologies, literature is entrusted with the task of acting as a literary device in incorporating criticism on contemporary social as well as domestic issues and politics. Both mythology and literature are intertwined to mirror human psyche. *Menaka's Choice* sets out to create binaries in human psychology by seeking out transformations in the life of this vastly discounted woman character of the epic.

Most did not know that Sita had a sister called Urmila! Or that Satyavati was a fisher girl who rose in station to become a queen and the grand matriarch of the Kuru dynasty who levered the fate and future of her family and Hastinapur. Be it a dark character like Surpanakha in *Lanka's Princess* or the treacherous Menaka of *Menaka's Choice*. Or be it a strong positive character like Urmila. I am simply telling the unheard story of a Surpanakha or Menaka and a Satyavati (Chakrabarti).

Kane's novels followed a common motif of woman emancipation and they reflected the socio-cultural standards of the modern times. She made them emancipated, inducing them with power and prowess to maintain a stance of their own. These women were made to speak for themselves, when no one did. Sometimes they also spoke for others and narrated their stories too. These novels were on guard in picking up those voiceless female characters to present them as protagonists contrary to the traditional portrayal of their identity and individuality. They are presented as ambitious and are capable to empower themselves. These works of art proved that each retelling has been a convenient way of keeping the stories dynamic for centuries. One of the reasons behind Kane's selection of her characters is out of the realization that they are petty figures who play a key role in the turning point of major events.

Though Menaka seems to be minor and minimal in the epic, her presence and role in *Menaka's Choice* is tough, spirited and resisting. This is the case with other female characters too. Even if they enacted the role of strong counterparts of their male protagonists in the epics, they were not made to speak and lead the plot. Instead they were attributed the role of silent spectators to all that happened before them. These narratives maintained that the women characters were not silent spectators, but silenced intentionally with the fear of questioning patriarchal and social constraints. Though they were bestowed with the task of enabling transformations and unfolding the dramatic events, their roles have been made unknown to the people. These characters remained obscure for they were unfortunate females. Likewise,

those discrepancies that overshadowed Menaka's presence got removed when she was made the heroine of the novel.

Nobody knows what had happened to Karna's wife when he was slain through betrayal. No one is concerned about Urmila and the kind of life she lived during those fourteen years of private exile. There is not even a mention of Menaka after her seduction of Viswamithra leading to the birth of Sakuntala. Despite the matter of Surpanakha's ferocity, no story is ever written on her life and about the circumstances leading to the transformation in her. Everyone is ignorant of her personal life and family. For Ahalya too, no one was there to lend their ears to her when she was alleged infidelity.

These aforesaid circumstances were a clear cut evidence for the age old conventions that led to the indifference towards female characters in general. Kane's decision to make them her heroines and give them a platform to voice a narrative of their own made the people understand that there would be no Sakuntala - Dushyanta story without Menaka, there would be no Sita abduction and the war that followed without Surpanaka, there would be no future for Hastinapur without Satyawati, there would be no Pandava - Kaurava story without Satyawati and no Gautama's story without Ahalya.

Let it be the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, there are yet many females who still crave for their stories to be told and who still long for a chance to tell their own tale. They were hardly given a chance to break those fetters of discrimination and patriarchy that made them captives of it. But

modern female revisionist renderings are ample platforms for them to come out of the trench. They maybe minor characters in terms of their presence but no epic is complete without them. The fundamental motif behind such reworkings was a complete and remarkable transformation of the minority women to set at ease for a standard and significant deviation both in literature and mythology.

These feminist revivalist renditions figured out those fatalistic elements that have been polishing the platforms of subjugation and patriarchy. It insinuated that certain discriminatory and institutional chasms have to be bridged with a focus on restoring essential and independent identity to those individuals who are denied justice and freedom of expression. Their stories told in different narratives are all about the differences in the people's interpretation of truth and reality. While producing a new Uruvi, a powerful Urmila, a bold Menaka, a new Soorpanaka, a mighty Satyavati and an awakened Ahalya, these novels made the readers witness those circumstances, events and its consequences leading to their silence.

Rather than being a romantic tale, *Menaka's Choice* celebrates a pawn like yet important figure's literal deification. The novel is all about the concept of elevation. It is not just a kind of spiritual elevation, but the character's success over those conventional limitations that have been restricting her from having an opinion of her own. The novel's attempt was not a foolish boasting of the character's super human powers or extra ordinary capabilities but a portrayal of her excellence in coming out of the patriarchal boundaries and

leading a life of her own. Finally Menaka chose to be free from all sorts of constraints and overpowered those traditional dogmas.

This novel becomes Menaka's voyage to retain her self-identity while the epics so comfortably washed off their hands while portraying her. Though the episodes of Vishwamitra have been mentioned a number of times, Menaka's tale has been made irrelevant not for being a seductress, but for being a fragile product of the patriarchal society. She remained unsung though she has won over the rishi. Those tales of the ancient past refused to glorify a woman who has enticed a rishi and overpowered him. Instead, most of the lores, legends and stories portrayed her as a manipulating courtesan who has by all wicked means and her body's tempting nature has made a rishi deviate from his strong 'tapas'. Though he himself got seduced by Menaka's enticing power, this incident has never been fully credited to Menaka, but has been told and retold as Menaka's crookedness and shrewdness over the most powerful rishi.

Apart from this usual portrayal of the character as a fragile seductress destined only to act in accordance with the directions and instructions of her superior, the novel became Menaka's triumphant resurrection from the shackles of forcible subjugation and conditioned suppression. The novel is a revelation that the female characters who have been living under the fetters of patriarchy are also capable of possessing indomitable courage, supreme powerfulness, great valiance, absolute determination, social dominance, strong and peculiar individuality and so on. Menaka's elevation has thus become a

strong contemporary classic wilfully aiming to topple down the imposed social restrictions.

Rather than facing these social constraints, Menaka has always been in constant controversy regarding her position and identity. Though the sagas of Indian mythology have dedicated numerous episodes regarding the importance of 'Naari Pooja' (worship of woman) and the position as well as privilege she deserves, no story in the mythology has ever maintained or followed this ideology and as a result, this kind of glorification and veneration of women existed only in plain scriptures and written texts. Practically and in real life situations, they have never even tasted the experience of living as self-esteemed and self-expressive characters, unless they are queens in the palace. The reason why the author chose to select women characters lie in the irony that is contained in Indian mythology. These women are the products of those doubly marginalized entities, being marginalized both for being women and for being submissive ones in mythology.

Menaka's Choice has been a symbolic voyage to step into these contradictions. Kane's novels made its female characters live as per their whims and fancies. Even if many of the 'puranas' and Vedic texts have mentioned in detail regarding how they should be honoured and treated, Indian mythology and its tales had already fixed a range for them and everything is built up based on this pre-fixed notion. So however hard they try to come out of these already established boundaries, this range holds them back to get conformed to the system.

Menaka's realisation regarding her identity was a turning point in her life. This realization comes from her own experiences of being a mere 'facilitator' to fulfil the needs of Indra, a dominant symbol of patriarchy. She has not even been given significant consideration of her own to be recognised as a living entity. She and her roles have always been purposefully ignored while producing narratives of paramount and practical importance. Menaka has been a shadowy figure only meant to lead the role of a catalyst. But this retelling let her perform and live as per her dreams and aspirations and opened the path for the modernisation of the character by means of her social roles.

As far as mythologies are concerned, there are specific kinds of classification based on the roles both men and women have to be performed. One of the prime factors that decide their roles is the system in which they all are supposed to fall in. Since these epics are written and their narratives are authored by men, everything is under their perception and that single angle could never be something out of patriarchal notions and views. Hence these females came to be objectified. Their subjugation was not a result of their weaknesses but due to the lack of a proper space of their own. Menaka like least discussed and silenced characters were denied from expressing their individuality. Hence they remained overlooked throughout.

When describing violence in retellings, a certain amount of subtlety can be maintained, and it should talk about sexual interactions and emphasize the darker side instead of the positive.

Stories glorifying sati were told earlier, we do not select such stories any more. We would rather write about women path breakers who fought and won Indian women the right to be free and to be seen as individuals. Our award-winning cover of Shakti is of a beautiful dark goddess. Our characters come in various hues and shades of skin as opposed to earlier times when the dark was always given to the evil. With the passage of time, there is an awareness of not typecasting. If earlier the battlefield was Panipat, today it is a sports stadium or a different kind of war, which is being waged to protect our planet. We have also introduced gender-neutral language wherever possible (Mehrotra).

Though they were subdued, they were forcefully made to take part in many successful incidents. When these incidents got fictionalised, their names still remained unheard and gradually with the passage of time, they got pushed into the lowest strata of social hierarchy. This practice continued for ever, until Kane retold it from their perspective. This narrative perspective of hers made the protagonists perceptible, potent and universal. Thus each and every character of Kane has by now attained the state of being remembered as classic entities in the minds of the readers. It marks their transformation from those imposed roles to that of their self-reflexive identities.

The female centered versions of mythological rewritings are flourishing with a prime focus to subvert the traditional male centric

interpretations of mythology. *Menaka's Choice* is the story of an often neglected mythical character's revolt against the imposed social orders, to announce to the world, her life and importance. In a world where female sexuality has been increasingly seen as dangerous and socially disruptive, females were portrayed of having little importance, just as a catalyst to contribute to the story thread of the so called heroes and victors. But here the woman is treated and glorified in a particularly grand and exalted manner where she is given her own choices and options towards her goal. As a means of character build out, the narrative also enabled Menaka to determine her qualities so that to make others notice and recognize her potential that the ancient epics failed to portray.

The prejudice and inequity rooted in one's sex or gender portrayed in the novel is a clear evidence for the reflection of the concept of sexism in it. Though sexism can affect anyone, it primarily affects the women characters especially those overlooked ones, when it comes to mythology. This very notion is brought together in stereotypes and gender roles in the narrative mainly in the case of the apsaras in the abode of Indra. Theirs have been treated as a sex or gender that is intrinsically inferior to the other. At times sexism in its extremity promotes sexual abuse, harassment and other form of sexual violence. This gender discrimination that opens the path for sexism ends up in losing their identity and makes them conscious about their sex differences.

They are essentially stories that revolve around heroic deeds performed by upper caste men, and the glory they sought to

crowns themselves with. There are limited roles that women can play in this world, most of them binary tropes that do no justice to their courage and strength. This continues to hold even when women occupy centre stage in these stories (Kriti).

Those forced impositions that are going on in Indralok and Indra's aggressive attempt to retain the women folks inferior to men often sets out to normalize his overrule and rest of the patriarchal social arrangements so as to portray everything natural, fine, adequate or inevitable. As a result no one finds any reason to resist and dares to question them. On contrary to this, Menaka's resurrection from the sexual constraints to subvert all sorts of sexual disparities bears fruit in the form of feminist consciousness that aims to show how women questioned and challenged their rights, duties, and position in this pre-modern society, both individually and collectively.

Menaka's feminine consciousness manifested in the novel is an instance of the critical awareness of her femininity both mentally and physically. This notion of feminist consciousness is employed as a sharp and promising tool throughout the story. Here the plot of Menaka gets developed and defined to reflect upon her experience of being a strong rebel who no longer remains as a puppet in the hands of Indra. The rest of the novel tells the story about Menaka the woman who brings about a shift from a meek submissive skivvy to a self-esteemed woman. Besides, she is still inspired by the privileges and responsibilities that come along her way for being an empowered woman.

Menaka's current social status, inside her community and beyond, reflects her strong female consciousness that exist within her. She maintains her role as a strong woman and chooses her feminist self-identification as a standard not to succumb to any constraint imposed on her. Her stance on female sexuality, female consciousness, gender relations and sexism has brought in cognitive variables for female identity. Apart from that the novel acts as a comfortable platform for Menaka to question and challenge sexual violence, inequality and injustice.

Thus, this very act of questioning of every patriarchal set up allows her re-inhabit her body and identity for this populist ideology is a unified approach that strives to reach out to every submissive woman who feels that their concerns are disregarded by those established patriarchal groups. She finds her own space and expands upon her reach and finds her own way to live in her body. She becomes conscious of the injustices happening in a world where she is also a part. That was how in her attempt to re-inhabit in her own body, she overturned the psychological imposition of being overlooked and the way she had been taught to be overlooked. Her shift was all about giving her more space than before and this is the substantial shift that the novel puts forward. Thus the novel mirrors the act of coming back to one's body; revisiting one's identity.

The novel seeks for ways about finding the experiences women had in search of a space of their own. Their existence and the kind of life that they had been experiencing are propounded here with subtle stereotyped images of

apsaras. The novel's revisitation to the mythical story of Menaka and her life overthrows the intrinsically sexist socialisation that prevailed in the portrayal of every female character. The author's treatment of Menaka as someone who is powerful enough to subvert the story line of the conventional patriarchal narratives and bring about a shift in the existing established norms and hierarchy projects the feminist revisionist come back of a once overlooked character.

Kavita Kane, in her selection of and interaction with Menaka, chooses to put across her image as that of the female, unlike any other that has been established under the mythological traditions into which they fall. Based on the qualitative inquiry into the differences between each interpretation of the female characters, *Menaka's Choice*, projects how feminist revisionist mythology plays a decisive role in advancing the representation of every female experience within the discourse of patriarchal narratives. With the rise of feminist revisionist movements and feminist consciousness, the popular mass witness certain revised formulations in the subject of the mythical stories recounted by the contemporary authors.

However, this revised version of Menaka calls her back to reside in her own body with her own identity to live the content life that she chooses to live. This feminist revisionist narrative, as opined by Alicia Suskin Ostriker in her foundational article *The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking*, is "the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth". Thus when viewed through this lens of revisionism, the

narrative mirrors the disparities of patriarchal myths in the epics. This retelling is an instance that each narrative is a result of the point at which the beam of creative and rational thinking strikes. No story can remain the same with the change of its critical angle. And this critical angle is what makes a story deviate from being a stereotypic form of its usual one.

To a great degree, the attributes of feminist consciousness incorporated in *Menaka's Choice* are informed by feminist theory. Each incident raises questions about men and women's relationships and roles in society. The plot's main thread itself is an instance of feminist politics that interrogates how these epics and legends have habitually repressed women, and what is required to get it fixed so as to make myths relevant to modern readers. The narrative's fundamental trait has got an affinity towards the traditional gender roles which have been perpetuated and hence it looks into how to subvert those roles which "cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive;" while women are deemed "emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (Ostriker).

As Ostriker opines, "these gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today". The gender roles that the world of Indra assigns to everyone especially the doubly marginalized females, forcefully enslaved them from their freedom and right to decide for themselves their position and role in society. As the novel's revisionist depiction of gender has negatively influenced the society's sexist consciousness, it could also bring to light that violent and painful aftermath of the created patriarchal norms that the society has inflicted upon the female

representations. The narrative also protests against the habitual neglect of women's existence in the mainstream as their neglect takes the form of distortion.

These traditional gender roles and power equations have to be changed as per the times. The traditional notion of men being superior to women needs to make way to a new world order where both men and women need to be treated with respect. That is feminism – questioning traditional hierarchies. But any shift in a power equation can happen only through gentle negotiations and not forced through. Policies made must be tempered with education and counselling. Else, we end up creating a lobby that rejects the whole idea, and actively resists any change (Mehrotra).

Mythological texts frequently advocate patriarchal rule as well as a so called quintessential moral behaviour while restricting what women can pursue and achieve. The goals and aspirations of women are always made subservient to the interests of men, and these epic texts portray females as agents to satisfy men's sexual desires. On the contrary, women who do not comply with these frameworks are stigmatized and condemned since these epical narratives rely on the 'ideal woman' image to reaffirm what a real woman looks like. Typically, these stories place women within a sexually oriented institution based on men's sexual consciousness generated within the patriarchal context.

Feminist retellings frequently use the language of the subdued women to refashion their subsistence and identity while modifying the narratives to meet the experiences of these overlooked women. *Menaka's Choice* is an explicit attribution of male space for female goals, and the fiction uses feminist revisionism as an effective method to retell the story from a feminist viewpoint, giving a platform to the voiceless and oppressed. The substantial influence of male gaze in any narrative points to the fact that, the power mechanism that works behind every set of mythical narratives has been a manipulation of men. Women are portrayed as docile objects of desire through a gendered prism, according to the notion.

The male gaze encompasses not only men's perceptions of women, but also how they construct female characters. The male gaze, according to feminist theory, is the practice of portraying women as well as society from a masculine viewpoint in the visual arts and literature, which exposes and characterizes women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male observer. These women are destined to act, live, and perform in accordance with phallic consciousness, and they are always bound by patriarchy's agency. Hence, the stories of women told by men often represent sexist imaginations and patriarchal assumptions rather than reality and they are frequently degraded.

The novel evinces that cases of domestic and sexual violence against women require classifying it according to the phenomena of multiple victimisation. Despite the fact that there is still no consistency on the meaning and concept of 'multiple victimisations', this work of art employs it to describe

the events of two or more forms of victimisation during one's life, in significant situations and/or inflicted by various agents.

This concept must be distinguished from polivictimisation, which includes four or more types of violence. Both of them are different from repeated victimisation and re-victimisation, which are related to more than one episode of the same type of violence (Finkelhor).

There has been a growing concern for examining the factors that may enhance the risk of multiple victimisations. Despite the fact that violence is a universal phenomenon that occurs in all circumstances, social background, sexuality, gender, race, culture, ethnicity and labour practices can all increase its risk. *Menaka's Choice* has implicitly emphasised intersectionality issues, arguing that the intersection of different systems of discrimination increases women's susceptibility to collective maltreatment. It also pictures the increase in the occurrence of continuous victimisation in the minority group, the apsaras and effectively captures intersectionality in order to investigate the multiple victimizations of these socially disadvantaged and marginalised women.

In her *The Battered Woman Syndrome*, Walker claims that most battered women have four characteristics: they genuinely think the violence is their responsibility, they can't put the blame for the violence upon anyone, they are worried about their lives and the lives of their children, and they believe their abuser is out there and observes whatever they do. While many battered

women choose to stay in abusive situations and relationships, Menaka deviated significantly from that stereotyped path and her narrative is subversive of the conventional notion of ‘vulnerability’ attributed to every female.

Vulnerability is supposed to imply an inherent weakness in women and an eventual susceptibility to sexual abuse. In agreement with feminist theorizing on sexual abuse and victimisation, vulnerability is considered both as a perplexing and crucial idea. In addition, the idea is usually regarded as problematic for it is associated with femininity and hence is always believed to be susceptible to damage. Vulnerability is thus a feminine idea, and its ambiguous nature stems from the way it is linked to femininity, fragility and reliance. As Ann Murphy affirms in *Violence and the Philosophical Imaginary*, the theme of vulnerability is “deeply vexed in the context of feminist theory, especially regarding the issue of sexual violence” (43).

However, the story serves as an indication that the inability to accommodate any woman is due to the refusal to acknowledge those distinctions, rather than the disparities between them. Though traditionally female strength has been berated with the idea that only consciousness of one's own subjugation may lead to liberation from traditional gender norms, Menaka seeks representation within the space that she exists and bears the torch of cultural transformation. She wants to belong and be accepted without being pushed to the edges. By perceiving the subjugation of women in these classic legendary narratives and reintroducing them into mythical narratives, *Menaka's Choice* offers a form of resistance that is only conceivable when one

discerns how subjugation works in real life. To put it simply, Kane is undoubtedly deeply convinced of the importance of coming out of the fetters, to the point that she believes it is worth it to strive to bring to light the real sense of feminine consciousness.

After decades of the feminist movement, small and big wins, women are asserting their space, unlearning intergenerational conditioning and raising their voice to demand equity. With these mythologies being re-telecasted, it's essential to broaden the narrative, to read the stories from inclusive perspectives and to start new conversations. The re-telling shows that an inclusive space is crucial to address discrimination and to create ripples of change (Amin).

Menaka's Choice could successfully recast Menaka with an eye to break the domestic shackles. Here, Menaka is elevated to the status where traditional women could not even dream of. And this is how she chooses to be free and independent. The main story is about how Menaka could oscillate between her world of choices and the dominating world of Indra. Writers like Kavita Kane and her works though have nothing to do with the mythological prototype, have got everything to do with the biased and static convictions of society. This resurrection of the feeble voices is one of the fundamental aspects behind the rereading of mythologies. These retellings provide them with their own lives they were supposed to have lived centuries ago. The relevance of Menaka's reconstruction of identity and her competency to act as

a representative of any female, revokes the typical gender roles while simultaneously manifesting and rejecting the kind of discrimination that still exists today.

Chapter IV

Oscillating Between the Ancient and the Modern

in

Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean

There are some things your forefathers didn't want you to forget. So they sent the story down through the mouths of the sutradhaar- storytellers who carry the thread. We are an unbroken lineage of storyteller nested within storyteller.

(Patil, 2).

India's first female graphic novelist Amruta Patil employs a free form of aesthetic style incorporating acrylic painting, collage, watercolour, and charcoal. The recurring topics in her works comprises of Memento mori, sexuality, myth, sustainable living, and the continuous thread of stories passed down through the generations. *Kari* was her first graphic novel which was authorised and published at Harper Collins India by V.K. Karthika. This bestseller explored the themes of human sexuality, mutual compassion and horrible death. It was this fine work of hers that fetched her the recognition of 'India's first female graphic novelist'. Patil's two successive graphic novels *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* and *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* form the *Parva* duology. This duology is a traditional yet realistic retelling of the tales from the epic *Mahabharata* through the perspective of the narrators, say the sutradhaars Ganga and Ashwatthama respectively. Later on the duology got translated into French and Italian.

Her extensive discussions with the most celebrated and renowned mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik made her author yet another graphic novel, *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*. It was published by Westland in October 2019. Patil excels in constructing and reconstructing narratives that are progressive, socially admissible and universally appealing. Throughout her writing career she has not been led by any prejudices and judgements but certain idealistic and fundamental principles. Her multi-layered narratives and their visual representations bring about innovative and advanced story threads capable of contemporising the remarkable episodes of Indian mythology. Her works picture the society irrespective of gender scepticism and inequality, identity politics and issues, sexuality and class.

Each of her stories is written with social and historical consciousness and is intended to rebuild the epics creating new parallels and alternatives. Since each book of Patil chronicles certain kind of socio political and domestic issues, her graphic novels are rich in flavour and exceptional popular interference. The narratives' incredible and exciting story line, intense and intricate artwork and page layouts lend themselves well to the graphic narrative structure. Patil's novels swing between the worlds of reality and fantasy and explore the theme of human psyche, letting them unite under a common ambience.

Amruta Patil's debut narrative fiction *Kari* is a 2008 non mythological novel set in Mumbai. It explores the story of an androgynous woman named Kari and the novel is a reflective inquiry of queerness, female sexuality and

feminine psyche. The author's quest to assemble fantasies and realities showed no indifference towards *Kari* though it deviated considerably from that of her graphic novels that followed. She picked *Kari* for she wanted someone to resemble her and take part in her plight and uncertainties. *Kari* is all about this woman employee in an advertising agency who is in love with Ruth. She has been portrayed as a prototypical eccentric where Patil fuses traits of her own life's collapse in a love affair.

While Patil left for France in 2014, she began her experiments in developing a duology- *Parva* duology, through the voices of two 'sutradhaars', drawing the plot and frame from the *Mahabharata*. The first part of the duology is known as *Adi parva: Churning of the Ocean* (2013) and the second is *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* (2016). *Adi Parva* is full of stories of creation and origins and *Sauptik* is all about abandonment. Both the sutradhaars vary noticeably in all their features and disposition. Infusing modern occurrences into the pre-existing stories from the *Mahabharata*, this duology mirrors people's current realities. She has always been through the right path following her own temperament in picking up stories that are to be retold with the help of her thread bearer- Sutradhaar.

Sauptik: Blood and Flowers too deals with the epic sagas from the *Mahabharata* through the perspective of yet another storyteller. It forms the model for its uniqueness in presenting the stories by inducing the thoughts along with being truthful towards the epic notions behind them. Experimenting with multiple alternatives, Patil also lets go of the conventional structure of storytelling. With stories from the mythology getting absorbed

suitably with the author's apprehensions, this novel exhibits evidences of a remarkable realistic narrative.

The book has been divided into units of individual plots where each and every incident in it gradually leads to the great devastating war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and its aftermath. Blending together the symbols both from the ancient and the contemporary politics, the novel captivates the readers by its unusual mode of presentation. Her graphic novels are not just a linear rendering of the mythology simply deviating from the usual story, but a multitude of eventful occurrences incorporating artistic and scenic beauty, conscious and rational thoughts, universal spirituality and fundamental and subjective reality.

Her collaboration with the author Devdutt Pattanaik resulted in the birth of her fourth novel *Aranyaka : Book of the Forest*. While they were conversing on the substantial difference in people's view of the world and the difficulties in perceiving one's point of view, the discussion ended up in the birth of *Aranyaka*. As the title suggests, *Aranyaka* has its setting in a most dangerous and distant forest. Rooted in realism, *Aranyaka* draws lessons from the Vedic Age. She also adopted maxims from the story of the great scholar of Advaita Philosophy, Yajnavalkya of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

Patil wilfully possessed an intense urge in her regarding the perception of the world in all its complexities and wanted to make her novels eventful, connecting it with reality. In an interview she comments,

I think if I am not able to connect old stories to people's current realities, then I have failed as a storyteller. It is important to make these links, especially with environmental issues and such. Otherwise stories are like museum pieces. They are dead. I am not interested in taxidermied curios or placing people in a 3000 year old time warp ("Making Waves").

The 'Adi Parva' or the 'Book of the Beginning' is the first book of the *Mahabharata* which shows how the epic happened to be recounted by Ugrasrava Sauti, son of Lomaharsana before the rishis who have assembled at the Naimisha Forest. It explores the contents from the eighteen books of the epic. Besides, there is a description regarding the history of the Bhāratas and the Bhrigus. The princes of the Kuru Kingdom, his birth and early life and the incidents that followed, Pandavas' persecution by Dhritarashtra and its consequent results and actions have been detailed in the prime portion of the book. Along with that, the history and genealogy of the Bharata and Bhriгу dynasties are also recited.

This first book of the *Mahabharata* and its stories has been chosen by the writer to retell her version of the story to perceive how if such stories are being retold. The most intriguing trait of this novel is its non-linear narration, narrated by Ganga, the sutradhaar. She is chosen to be the narrator for she is the omnipresent potential of the holy waters capable of reaching everywhere. Thus she flowed everywhere passing down the story. It is this narrative style that intentionally made the story incomplete in all its dimensions. The novel

deviates from the conventional mode of maintaining a chronological order and relies on ironic juxtapositions and the plot gets arranged and rearranged within. Being a graphic novel, its drawings, paintings and style are as fundamental as the words.

These comic styled illustrations in *Adi Parva* elucidate reflections on life, contemporary issues of socio-political interest and ancient stories of the gods and goddesses. The novel also allows provisions for an exploration of both literary and non-literary approaches to reading the *Mahabharata* story. Thus this retold work of art that bears marks of literary and non-literary elements such as words and images, colour and combinations, dialogues and illustrations combines these discrete heads as mutually related categories. Through this analytical enterprise, the two modes of expression, i.e., the visual and the verbal are never quite wholly different but both find a way of literalizing the metaphor of 'retelling'. Here Patil has exquisitely woven the concepts of 'displaying' and 'telling' as inseparably yoked activities. This model graphic telling of Patil did not simply confine the genre of graphics into drawing and scripting. Instead, it beautifully popularized the visual metaphors as well as the verbal images.

Generally speaking, graphics are usually shorter and allow for a far more visual presentation of the text. A graphic novel is not a collection of random comics, nor is it an anthology. Instead, it is a story that is normally contained within a single book and is continuous. Around fifty years ago, there was no novel like a 'graphic novel.' Richard Kyle coined the phrase in an

essay published in *Capa-Alpha*, a comic magazine in 1964. Following the publication of Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* in 1971, the word gained popularity and became more generally used. A graphic novel, according to Merriam-Webster, is "a story presented in comic-strip format and published as a book." This definition does contain some limitations.

The novel's non-linear structure and disordered presentation itself is a fine instance for the purposeful deviation from the basic mode of storytelling. The novel talks about the balance between various extremes and life as such. *Adi Parva* begins with an introduction of the creation myths involving Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara, and their conversation. Along with discussing about the cosmic balance, the novel also highlights the need for an "unbroken lineage of storyteller nested within storyteller" (5). Hence, rather than bringing only Ganga to narrate the story, the novel also brought in many villagers as listeners to Ganga's story so that she can have a successor. The storytellers get changed at a particular point or course of time, and as a result, the next storyteller continues with the same story. This diversity in each telling depends significantly upon the narrator.

Adi Parva exists as something so much more than a graphic fiction. Its widely accepted form and style meant so much to the culture that recreated it. The narrative includes stories of religious rites, of gods and wars, their victories and losses, of destruction, havoc, solitude or peace they bring into the world. The novel also maintains the idea that mythology cannot always be

regarded solely as fiction for these stories continue to be significant to the cultures that produced them. As a result, these legends, stories, beliefs and guidelines laid out by these cultures are vital to the propagation of the messages these stories are meant to devise through the sutradhaar. They always keep track of a perfectly arranged array of life situations, practices and significations.

Having the perceptions and opinions of the popular mass, the novel interferes into those fetters of social constrains that have been discriminating the common mass on the basis of class and sexuality. The narrative let the people inquire thoroughly into the multitude of possibilities behind each set of mythological story and made them part of its journey. They also go for discussions based on the stories that have been told by the sutradhaar. *Adi Parva* could devise alternatives among the public for this graphic novel varied widely in both style and format. The novel narrates its incidents visually and the content, themes and target audiences vary significantly from that of other comics. Apart from the other graphic novels' exclusive intention to appeal visually to child readers, *Adi Parva* targeted both youth and adult audiences since this work of art bears darker themes, art styles, and content than those aimed at child readers.

The selection of the epic *Mahabhart*a, was on the basis of a source text that is elaborate in itself with multiple interpretations. This Indian epic of heroism, bloodshed, war, love and sacrifice, needs no introduction among

Indians. It is a sheer plethora of the stories of magnificent gods, magical weapons capable of creating destructions, mighty and skilful archers, royal kings and queens, heavenly kingdoms, venerable and enlightened sages, genuine and universal brotherhood, passionate and unconditional love affairs, revolutionary and ruinous warfare, terrible and awful curses, victorious and veteran warriors, bloody and terrific battles and so on. Hence the *Mahabharata* offers a plethora of stories that forms the symmetry of love for love, conflict for conflict, revenge for revenge and torture for torture.

The stories offered by the *Mahabharata* were so complex that each and every incident, event and character seems to appear repeatedly in another context with different identities of their own. The novel *Adi Parva* is narrated with the help of one of the characters of the epic so that no external biases would dismantle the stories' essence. At the same time, the novel also gave prime importance to those villagers who have assembled there to listen to the story for they are the only ones who are capable enough to contribute elements of criticism.

Adi Parva begins with red blood panels with a vulture roaming around. The book opens in a night focusing on a cow that has been coveted by two villagers. During their conversation, the owner of the cow, a lady appears before them. She is the storyteller (sutradhaar) that Patil wanted to introduce before the readers. As she began to narrate the story of a hermit named Mandavya, they hesitated to pay attention for they did not like the way the story was headed. No matter how many times a story is told and retold, it was

always their story people wanted to hear. Hence the sutradhaar decided to narrate a story involving the life and presence of every person. She sets about with the story of King Janmajaya and his sacrificial ground. A group of villagers, say farmers have assembled around a huge tree on the banks of a river to get their doubts solved and questions answered from a strange woman who sits there. The woman is that same storyteller assigned by the author and the rest of the story gets unveiled through this storyteller, Ganga – the River Goddess.

Retold here in colourful and dramatic splendor, this graphic novel focuses on the key narrative themes of creation, preservation and destruction with the help of the divine river goddess Ganga as the sutradhaar. In Patil's view, Ganga in *Adi Parva* is the sublime river goddess, a queen, an unsentimental mother who can drown her babies unflinchingly. She believed that the one who is capable of wielding and unfurling each myriad individual thread of the stories is traditionally known as the sutradhaar or the thread bearer. Here Ganga being Patil's thread bearer, she portrayed Ganga as a good teacher, who spoke in the language of the hour, and was free to devise the narrative to reflect the time.

Ganga begins her story with Lord Vishnu creating different 'yugas' (epochs) of the universe, armored and safeguarded by the protective coils of Anant, the infinite serpent. Brahma too is on his duty of stirring and creating lives on earth. As soon as they finished their task, they started arguing regarding the true creator among them. Patil's *Adi Parva* uncoils out from here

where her readers are free to interpret and ask questions. As they ask questions, various stories get added and form layers of individual threads passing on to one another. The novel unfurls and maintains connectivity between the different story threads with the help of the storyteller. Here the narrative makes the audience recall the forgotten story threads with the aid of sutradhaar in a unique style.

Though graphic novels are often confused with comics, they are advancing as a favoured medium of storytelling, exclusively as a new genre, appropriating a turf in the conventional classical lore. Any attempt to characterize the essence of "comics," to establish it as a distinct art form, and to address the medium's formal qualities is referred to as comics theory. Since the 1960s, comic books have received a lot of attention from academics in a variety of subjects. This is partly related to broader concerns to the once-dominant authoritarian systems in academia. However, academia has been undemanding in accepting comics as a significant topic of study, and "comics studies" is to be established as a discipline in its own capacity.

The assumption that comics are connected with immature or unsophisticated storytelling has contributed to this situation. Such irrational bias overlooks the genre's tremendous aesthetic accomplishments. Comics have a privileged authority in France and Japan than they do in the United Kingdom or the United States, and they are really a part of the tradition as a

whole. Although genre entertainment still dominates the media, the number of "art comics" is on the rise, and the production has moved towards new formats such as graphic novels and web-comics. Even if the numerous preconceptions concerning the study of comics are dispelled, the question of how comics should be classified persists. The academia is now gaining ground for the expansion of creative practice in the field of graphic narrative, which can be defined as narrative work in the genre of comics.

Amruta Patil has the impression that, graphic novels vary significantly in Europe and they have evolved beautifully over the years, creating characters and dealing with subjects that remain specific to mythology where superheroes handle social issues, revolutions and political conditions. The appeal of watching visual art forms while concomitantly analyzing literature entice spectators and encourage them to explore and be creative. Though learning the fundamental complexities of how to interpret, analyze, and comprehend *Adi Parva* to fully appreciate the genre is challenging, it is aimed to teach how social commentary, fictional elements, narrative perspective, and discourse create a unique narrative experience within the readers.

Graphic novels in general use a variety of panel shapes to elicit various feelings and emotions. They incorporate literary characteristics such as an issue, resolution, storyline, setting, a storyteller, and a theme to portray real or perceived thoughts or happenings. For its desired effect, graphic narratives also employ literary devices such as dialogue, visual images, and story pace

that operate in harmony with paneled graphics. Here Patil has devised imageries to amplify emotions and to shift time.

The plot of the story is driven by her use of intentional dialogues. Heroes are frequently born from adversity, and the sutradhaar's growth is aided by actions, ideas, thoughts, dialogue, and metaphorical representations. Furthermore, the narrative's conclusion delivers a pertinent resolution to the story's problem. Graphic authors often employ technology in the creation of their narratives for these stories are to be retold for they are like new shoots that need to be nurtured with consistency. Each telling is like a new coating of polish to a wooden plank to make it look afresh and shine forever. Likewise, every fine retelling adds to the glow of the story by keeping it alive over centuries.

Though the novel is meant to be a retelling of the *Mahabharata* story, those stories which the forefathers did not want their children to forget are being told and passed on with the help of the sutradhaar here. *Adi Parva* paints the world of sutradhaar in black and white and the *Mahabharata* story in vibrant colours. As the *Mahabharata* is an immense narrative where each reader discovers diverse perspectives in its different renderings, this graphic novel having stories nested within stories, provides space for innumerable judgments and thoughts. Patil begins the book as follows:

There are some things your forefathers didn't want you to forget. So they sent the story down through the mouths of the sutradhaar-storytellers who carry the thread. We are an

unbroken lineage of storyteller nested within storyteller. When I open my mouth, you can hear the echo of storytellers past (2-3).

The audience was supposed to trust that humble storyteller who knew how to unravel the thread in the novel. Hence, anyone who lends the ears to the storyteller becomes the future thread bearer. So everyone needs to stay along with the story since the thread bearer gets changed as the story gets transformed from one person to the other. And if one does stay with the story, the story reveals itself like an ‘unfurling rose’. Narrated by Ganga, this very promising retelling of the *Mahabharata* mirrors the roles and relations of men and women, their issues of sexuality and gender politics.

The gender imagery theorized in *Adi Parva* demands a bit more fluidity of gender roles. Apart from the traditional patriarchal convention, the narrative also mirrors the leading conceptions in gender politics of the time due to socio-cultural practices and internalized pressure. The ever time controversy regarding the historical and fictional aspects of mythology has been viewed as genuine throughout the work. For the narrative, the essence mattered more than the historicity of the story.

Adi Parva's approach to storytelling was an endeavor to converge several traditional and existing practices of the society. The novel maintains a solid conviction that no story is fully accorded only to a single group of people. The narrative explores the lost and constructed identity and breathes new life into the *Mahabharata* stories through the opulent visuals. Apart from that, *Adi Parva* also blends the threads of sexuality and feminism in its

depiction of the *Mahabharata* story through the thread bearer- sutradhaar in an effort to transform and overthrow the existing gender and domestic legacies.

This graphic narrative is a result of the author's simultaneous delving of both scripting and drawing. It chronicles a personal journey than a mere narrative of the epic and like a river, flows into the readers from some indefinite origin. The story of the churning of the ocean dates back to the best known episodes in the *Mahabharata*, especially in the *Vishnupurana*. It provides the readers with the classic image of creation by means of the ever continuing struggle between the ever strong oppositional pairs- the 'devas' (gods) and the 'asuras' (demons). Menaka the celestial beauty is believed to have taken her birth during the course of the process of churning of the ocean. Along with her, many fine treasures have also obtained, which later on became part of both earthly and heavenly prototypes. But *Adi Parva* bases its story only on a few episodes from the *Mahabharata* mainly focusing on the aspects of 'creation', 'preservation' and 'destruction'. The text maintains that everything happens concurrently despite of the indigenous and absolutely fascinating world view that shapes each image and symbol.

The popular representatives in the novel are often seen as sceptic concerning the holy figures and their activities. At times they are found arguing with each other on that issue. They also had different arguments regarding the formation of the universe and the creation of life in it. While some argued that the universe had emerged from a golden egg, some believed that, it had come out of a golden womb. There were also arguments regarding who created it. Some hold that Brahma created everything. But some other

believed it to be Shiva. According to some, Shiva created both Brahma and the universe. Some even found it as ridiculous to think of a boy with lotus sprouting navel, Vishnu created everything. This was how the debate went on. Such sort of discussions and popular interventions were exactly what the sutradhaar wished for.

Though the trinities associated with creation argue with each other to claim the credit of creation, finally they arrive at a mutual understanding of their individual importance in the creation of the universe. This is an instance in the story which mirrors one's sportive imagination regarding mythologies' appeal to modern responsiveness. Each narrative has got an innate novelty to go for numerous manifestations. *Adi Parva* made the people know the extensive responsibility of staying unwavering towards the original story and it achieved the effects of transcendentalism by not being captivated by earlier expositions of the story.

The novel lets all the representatives talk for each person reveals himself and speaks the minds of a few others too. Thus *Adi Parva* is an exchange between Ganga, the narrator and the villagers throughout. The author's option of this sort of narration was mainly because of the fact that she can supply the readers with individual perceptions too, rather than sticking onto a monotonous mode of narration. The novel also lets Ganga ask about people's affinity towards divinity. "Do you believe divinity has something to gain by having you on its side?" (70). Moreover, Ganga has been introduced as

the queen of celestial rivers, to induce her, a sort of authority so that people would listen to her.

I am Ganga, queen of celestial and earthly rivers. I feed your land, I raise the fish. I cleanse you of soil and sin, I carry the remains of the dead. I plant stories, I carry stories. If you are too far away from my shore, call any river by my name and I will be she. I am your mother. Until the end of your world, I will stand by you (40).

During the course of her narration, Ganga has already found out her next thread bearer and she has given a hint too to the readers. She got fascinated with the mad man who has been following her and she resorted to pass on the story to him. When Ganga told her decision to the villagers, they were not at all happy for he is a madman. But for Ganga the narrator and Patil the writer, he was not a madman. “He is saner than the lot of you put together. And the thread of this story will soon pass from me to him. He will be your next sutradhaar. But it isn’t time for him enter your story” (141). His name was Ashwatthama, the next thread bearer of Patil’s sequel to this novel. *Sauptik : Blood and Flowers* is thus narrated by Ashwatthama.

After having told many stories, Ganga extends the scope of the stories by making it loop over and over. Every end of each story acts as a nucleus for a new beginning for each story contains a world yet to be unravelled in it. Likewise, each time these worlds get revealed through each telling, the stories

get polished again and again. As these stories get polished, they shine forever paving way for further tellings. For the narrator, what mattered the most was the task of finding a successor to carry over the story thread. The novel ends with Ganga's notes "it is time for me to leave the skein in the hands of the next sutradhaar" (257).

The novel also insists on reconsidering the stories that have been narrated by the sutradhaar. Let whoever be the thread bearer, *Adi Parva* always made sure about the consistency of its listeners in staying with the story. Rooted in the *Mahabharata*, *Adi Parva*'s mode of retelling is more like a re-presentation of the epic than a retelling of the epic. Viewed entirely through a different angle having numerous arrays of fictional characters, alternative plot and storyline, *Adi Parva* is rich in modern sensibilities. This graphic representation of the age old mythical stories mirrors the innate contemporary consciousness hidden in each and every story of it.

The novel has maintained a perfect hybridity while associating themes and symbols with the content and the painting. It has also made the readers awake throughout with the help of the varied motifs that have incorporated in it. One of the elementary notions behind the novel's blending of images with words is to have clarity in conveying ideas. It was the painting that has narrated the story more than the Sutradhaar or the words themselves. This graphic novel could supply ideas without having any further explanation or commentary based on the theme that is being discussed in it. The drawings and

paintings add to the general mood, mythical ambience as well as the thematic background of the novel.

This mythical reworking resorted to break the fetters of conventional dogmas by deviating considerably from the basic tales of the *Mahabharata* story. It supplied the novel with certain other characters from the real life to have a better experience of retelling. The villagers were made to interfere in the story and bring about alternative expositions and ask questions and state opinions based on the events that are happening in front of them. Each episode of the novel was intentionally made half done to see the audience's stance in perceiving the stories. The narrative's oscillation between this rural and mythological space was purposeful. Also, the fiction utilizes the possibilities within those existing mythical tales for the widening of the spectrum of individual lives, social concerns and virtual realities. Apart from that the novel seeks to flesh out the significance of collective response in completing the narrative and swings between reality and mythology by means of its paintings.

Each event portrayed in *Adi Parva* is depicted as a live event for the villagers who have assembled there to hear the story. The narrator Ganga on the other hand lets the villagers contribute their opinions. Her end was to narrate the same epical story she has chosen along with the indulgence of popular mass. Hence the novel contains questions and some of them are answered by themselves after having a group discussion. The sutradhaar here is obsessed with making the popular mass ruminant upon the stories. She also provides a platform for them to connect the past with the present and allows

them to utilize the narrative space to break those social and hierarchical barriers that restricted the access to mythologies.

The sutradhaar's audience ask questions. The only time we feel safe enough to ask a question s when we know half the answer. Else we sit still in a crowded room, hoping some extroverted other will speak what's on our mind. Contemporary forums for question-asking are almost always crowded rooms that seem better suited for decisive conversation and the show-off questioner than for one asking a sincere question. When you question the origins of the universe, it isn't the universe you're testing; you're testing the depth, sturdiness and mettle of your own self (259-260).

Yet another reason for devising the concept of sutradhaar in this epic retelling was from the realization regarding the kind of tradition they had in passing down the story. This graphic retelling and its structural renderings fall in to the spectrum of modern re-presentation of the ancient past. Besides, owing to its narrative style, this excellent blending of the past with the present votes for a path breaking revival. The setting of the sutradhaar and the way Ganga narrates the story, the audience in it and their discussions point to the age old oral tradition of storytelling. The novel sets the traditional facets of storytelling in a contemporary narrative platform to incorporate multiple views in the same telling.

Each part of *Adi Parva* unfolds before this group of villagers including people of all age groups and occupations. Those were stories that really mattered and hence the sutradaar wanted her stories to be disclosed in front of somebody who represents the present. Rather than inculcating the seed of imagination, she added the flavour of thought process making the novel colourful in its narration. *Adi Parva* never intended to have a view point of its own but a collective cognition from the side of the readers. It sows the seeds of generative thoughts and participation by keeping each plot line incomplete and arranging scope for further questions. She wanted her audience to be sceptical so that it gets discussed about and talked on each time.

When stories get discussed and retold, such practices keep them alive forever. This makes the purpose of the storyteller easier for each and every person becomes the thread bearer themselves in taking initiatives to pass the stories on to the future generations. *Adi Parva* begins by that very ambition of the forefathers. They wanted their sons not to forget certain stories and hence they too wanted it to be told and retold generations after generations. That is why they have assigned a cosmic sutradhaar to carry over the thread. They never wanted any single story to be left untold and lost amidst of any kind of chaos. They mainly resorted to break the social constraints for they never wanted any individual life to get trapped within the shackles of social, patriarchal, gender and cultural frontiers.

Every story has been framed in such a way that each layer in it offers a unique perspective and unfolds a different story to pass down. Hence, a chain

of sutradhaars has to be born and reborn to make all these stories unveiled in an entirely different scenario. In addition, each story has got something different to offer when it gets transformed from one generation to the other. No story can remain as the same as before, when it gets retold in an entirely different background and social condition. At the same time, no two thread bearer can narrate the same story in the same manner. So, one can be on surer grounds that such stories would never die out. Their continuous tellings and retellings create an entirely different mode of perception seeking to contemporise myth and literature in terms of everyday life and behaviours. Their relative closeness is thus better understood with each telling and paves the way for multiple angles of perception forming numerous layers of alternatives to engage with mythology.

The sutradhaar blends the past with the present not in terms of the narratives' interpretation but in terms of the narratives' relation to the mode of telling it and opts for a more convenient way of storytelling inviting the popular mass to be a part of the story. Rather than being a run of the mill mode of storytelling, the sutradhaar carries the thread over the next sutradhaar to continue with the act of storytelling.

Though Indian epics have undergone many tellings and interpretations, their retellings are those which provide them with a different identity. *Adi Parva* is basically a new re-presentation of the epic rather than being labelled as a kind of telling. But the novelty it offers and the medium it uses for telling makes this fictional narrative deviate from the fundamental stereotypic mode

of presentation. While the sutradhaar tells the story, it was the popular listeners' opinions, questions, responses, reactions and suggestions that made the novel more than a telling. The sutradhaar presents her stories as such and *Adi Parva* oscillates between the historical glories of the past and the representative images of the present in unravelling the story threads.

In Patil's graphic novel, the sutradhaar is the lovely Ganga who tells you her version of the great story of creation. Her stories are as ageless, spell-binding and timeless as she is - so don't bother asking her logical questions like "when exactly, or where exactly". The style of story-telling is circular, and one story flows into another – sometimes with ease, sometimes abruptly (“Adi Parva”).

The sutradhaar is the one who maintains the balance between these two worlds of human experiences, thoughts and realisation. Inspired by the visual arts of Indian temple art, Mughal Miniatures, Japanese Silkscreen prints, Egyptian funerary art, Mahayana Buddhist imagery, Iconic art from Medieval Europe, the novel explored all sorts of artistry imbibed from that. Thus this graphic novel of hers is rich in visual and conventional images and expressive and dramatic symbolisms. The significant shifts in styles she has employed were intentional to “allow for the story nested within story approach” (Gravett). Moreover, this graphic retelling has something to do with the philosophical renderings behind the cosmic life and balance with the help of the fundamental elements from the *Vishnupurana*.

The nucleus knows neither heroes nor villains. Similarly, Vishnu has no personal investment in the tussle between Deva and Asura, consonance and dissonance, antigen and pathogen, light and dark. There is no naïve promise that light will eventually annihilate dark or consonance will eventually smoothen out dissonance. The only reason Vishnu intervenes is to maintain balance (94-95).

The myth of churning of the ocean is one of the recurrent motifs in Hindu lore. It is the acquisition of supernatural power through penance and meditation. This could also be considered as the celebration of the predominance of Vishnu's second incarnation 'Kurma' the tortoise. This might put together various other thoughts rather than its fundamental theme of immortality. It is widely observed that one of the frequent patterns of many myths is how gods are challenged by the antigods and in the end how they defeat the rivals and re-establish peace.

As the sutradhaar's audience included pilgrims and householders, vagrants and nomads, believers and skeptics, mad men, passerby and so on, their interrogations were sometimes simple and some other times powerful and intrinsic. Almost all the questions were answered with the help of another story. But at times some questions were left unanswered. "Sometimes because the questions isn't ready for an answer yet, sometimes because the answer is waiting to unfold a little later, sometimes because a readymade answer would make things too easy" (259).

This unique practise would bring to focus the need to polish stories and refashion them. The visuals are in such a form that they represent a uniform pattern for the stories, the incidents and the scenes where the sutradhaar appears. Though the novel has incorporated both acrylic paintings and charcoal drawings, both are meant individually for two different backgrounds. The charcoal drawings in the white background is the pattern followed for the portrayal of the sutradhaar, the common mass and their discussions. These are the scenes that followed involving the people and their discussions. The rest of the visuals are painted colourfully with acrylic paints to present the story part that the sutradhaar narrates. The choice of the sutradhaar was also based on someone who represented the same place, time and context in which the story has been narrated. The novel also maintains that a good storyteller should excel in the language and social context of the hour, with an ultimate focus on the excellence of the tale that is being narrated.

Patil's story is devoid of superfluous explanation. The storyteller's voice, on the other hand, is distinct, cold, sarcastic, and always dramatic. Ganga and her audience act as a kind of Greek chorus, with their responses and questions assisting in the clarification of the main story. Employing a female voice is a simple yet revolutionary decision, allowing Patil to naturally focus on the females with ease and empathy. *Adi Parva* self-consciously portrays itself as a retelling of the *Mahabharata's* numerous nested narratives as a single story. Thus *Adi Parva* enshrines the ancient stories in book form, imprinting them not only orally but also artistically.

Every telling reflects the time and space it belongs and contemporises the incidents. Apart from that, each telling has got different symbolisms and imageries along with the relevant subjects to be dealt critically. Hence, each narrative is a critique of the contemporary scenario in its unique form, style, pattern and narrative strategy. Patil's style was more appealing since she has maintained to strike a balance between the conventional as well as the contemporary mode of storytelling. Her *sutradhaar* has thus proved to be not just a storyteller, but the one who maintains the story alive from being withered away. Furthermore, the concept of self-reflexivity is what the fiction has been maintaining throughout, with the aid of the discourse of popular interventions. Each person's opinion is self-reflexive of themselves, their identity and collective mentality.

Indian mythology is an extensive discipline widely accepted to contribute primarily to maintain heritage and literature. This has been skillfully utilized as the authors' platform to manifest their own views on the social and political conditions of contemporary India. Likewise, *Adi Parva* is a result of Patil's rethinking and revisioning of the *Mahabharata*. The work is an outlook of some re imagined pasts and it has now become a medium for she tells stories in terms of how she prefers to narrate it by employing a mediator. Apart from literary excellence, each retelling promises multiple perceptions, despite being limited to a single course. The need of the hour is to discover 'why such retellings' rather than 'how it is being retold'.

The narrative attempted to explain these complex sagas in terms of everyday life, that is, how myth can be taken out from the mainstream to get it placed among the popular mass. Such retellings also prevented people from going to the past in search of answers. They made them capable enough to find answers by themselves from their own life. More than mere mythical retelling, it has brought in the mythical world present in the contemporary life. Rather than adapting myth as a literary device of primitive tradition, this graphic retelling has employed it to highlight the contemporary happenings. The novel has made a comparison regarding a mythical character's life retold in a completely different way. Besides it could project socio political issues and bridge different cultural scenario to a common understanding of the thread. Every retelling in general, has utilized myth, history and fiction to present reality. This is to make the people acknowledge and evaluate how mythology has been reinvented to inculcate the ongoing cultural practices. For those retellers, myth functions as a tool to paint life as such.

Adi Parva blurs the cultural boundaries by the interference of sutradhaar. The audience's role and interference in the novel breaks the boundaries that had made mythology something very inaccessible. Here, Patil stresses the role and importance of the popular mass in each episode of the fiction for it is they who provide life to it, by supplementing traces of culture and conditions which they are a part of.

The novel presents only just a mesmerizing slice from those multitudes of interconnected stories. What made the novel more impressive is the wide disposition of the colours employed by the artist in representing

various episodes. Each colour is symbolic of the situations presented. In this feminist rendering of the *Mahabharata*, the author's art of using vibrant and black and white colours visuals as well as the graphics let the fiction master over those patriarchal practices and customs. The background of each event and the mode of depiction of each character is in alignment with the colour she has used to spill the pages. One of the prominent features that lacks in other retellings is this usage of multi props for interpretation. The novel ends with the author's note on the need of retelling stories.

Like *Adi Parva*, Patil's *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* too follows similar strips and patterns. Narrated by the wounded Ashwatthama, son of Guru Drona, *Sauptik* retells the stories from the *Mahabharata* incorporating incidents from the 'puranas'. The book is all about the rising hostility and the fateful devastations of war between Pandavas and Kauravas, Draupathi's swayamvara and molestation. The author's sutradhaars were always curious enough to find the motives behind each character's actions. These retellings are the products of people's individuality and they create an understanding of the events and characters rather than casting judgments on them and their actions.

While striving to create an impression among the readers regarding the visibility of the ideas and crafts employed, the author has travelled a lot by raking up tools to create this association in the minds of the readers. The readers on the other hand, perceive these symbols with the help of the scripting and drawing she does and gradually they too fall in the myriad of the cast of characters and take part in storytelling. The novel's intention to incorporate

popular representations was a result of the immense potential they possess to deal with each set of philosophical stuff in mythology. Besides, the innate relation between mythology and popular representations is that, mythology is the interpretive platform where these representations tread on. Both exist simultaneously and are mutually dependent of each other. Mythology's connection with popular mass has also been inculcated in *Adi Parva* on the basis of their role in expanding upon copious threads.

Adi Parva, at least in part, undertakes the task of storytelling through drawing by keeping the problem of style, visible. It is also composed in a style that always rejects simplicity and visibility. The story endorses an artistic form in which the traces of handwriting is an integral part of the rich information a reader receives as a result of this foregrounding of the labour of the hand. It also has a multi-layered narrative vocabulary, language of comics, which includes the spoken, the visual, and how these two kinds of articulations interact on a page.

Though this graphic novel does not follow a linear structure in keeping a track with the chronology, one can trace a mutual link between its plot structure and the purpose behind the telling somewhere there in the novel. The story ends from where it begins forming a cyclic plot structure. *Adi Parva* could thus tactfully lead its readers along a path of its own while remaining strange in its presentations and trajectories. Patil's intuitive and aesthetic sense of imagination, perpetual religious knowledge and scrupulous observance made her a principal and ingenious author of mythological graphic novels in India.

Having philosophical explanation for each and every tale presented in the source text, *Adi Parva* approaches the rational domains of advancements that happen in a society. The sutradhaar directs the audience towards the boundaries that have been acting as a hinder to their goal. Gradually, the audience could also rise to the standards of the sutradhaar and that is how Ganga chooses the next sutradhaar. The chain of these thread bearers revise the existing dogmas and practices so as to bring about ample revival in all walks of socio-political and cultural facets. While *Adi Parva* seems to be a personal journey of the sutradhaar, she carries each and every participant along with her in the form of representations. As these tales told by the sutradhaar hold no religious connotation for any kind of activity, the meanings of her teachings are echoed in the form of principles and philosophies for future generations.

Adi Parva exists as something so much more than a graphic fiction. Its widely accepted form and style meant so much to the culture that recreated it. The narrative includes stories of religious rites, of gods and wars, their victories and losses, of destruction, havoc, solitude or peace they bring into the world. The novel also maintains the idea that mythology cannot always be regarded solely as fiction for these stories continue to be significant to the cultures that produced them. They always keep track of a perfectly arranged array of life situations, practices and significations.

Adi Parva points to the fact that every piece of writing needs to be revised, if it fails to embrace and recognise inclusivity. Such works in popular

literature will ensure the pluralities of mass participation. Patil intended to show that there is a fascinating world out there with so many great magical features, which is why she chose to experiment a fresh spin on the *Mahabharata* stories. Making viewers a part of the novel is a modern development, as classic Indian epics are meant solely to be accepted and digested. The viewers depicted here engage with the retellings and evaluate the existing mainstream frameworks. As a result, this book serves as a window into a world where people are free to inquire, judge, and interrupt.

The author's choice of this graphic mode of narration was quite purposive for she meant to create parallels among all those stories she has been retelling. For that particular notion she chose this mighty sutradhaar along with the graphics and paintings. Later on the medium was found to be working even better, meeting everyday lives and needs. The novel established the fact that handling fictional and remarkable mythical characters demands a fluid medium and style, impressive and thought provoking ambience where the threads can be floated easily. With regard to all these requirements, this mythical fiction could create fleeting thoughts and lively impressions among the readers. By making the characters sensible and events momentous rather than objectifying them on the basis of certain facts and maxims, *Adi Parva* bridges the sacrosanct and earthly beings with the aid of the sutradhaar.

Chapter V

Mythical Mediatisation through Television Narratives

Television, and understandings of television, have evolved a lot in just a few years. It is easy to think that this change in television is a recent development or that recent changes are far more significant than those of the past. Television changed considerably during the 50s or so years before internet distribution as well (Butler, 16).

Television narratives have evolved as a result of the progressive transformation in storytelling techniques and narrative structures that could be found in literature and media. Television as a visual narrative becomes the comprehensive exposition of popular culture. Popular television narratives follow definite standards when it comes to storytelling. With the aid of psychologically defined characters that reflect the inner psyche of the everyday people, the loosely structured narrative plot and story threads, both television series and films share some elements in common. All these basic and critical elements set out to deal with some possible events with intellectual coherence, skilful tactics and practical rationality.

As far as television narratives are concerned, they employ popular culture studies that deals with the textual analysis based on reception theory. It treats each visual narrative as a text to be explored and interpreted critically by means of the discipline of Television studies. Charlotte Brunsdon opines that Television Studies is an “aspirationally disciplinary name given to the

academic study of television” (303). More than merely studying it as a perspective of mass communication research or media studies, television studies tend to approach these narrative texts from the perspective of social studies that comes under the umbrella of Cultural Studies. While dealing with the social functions of television, it can also be studied on the basis of the departments of sociology and social psychology to a certain extent.

When it comes to the textual analysis of television narratives, audience theory or reception theory is often concerned with the response of the audience and their interpretation based on the narratives they receive. As mythological narratives are being telecasted in terms of animated movies, series, feature films and performed serials, the audience themselves becomes the construct that these texts have been addressing. This aspect of Audience theory that has emerged out of cultural studies and literary theory has turned to be an element of thinking concentrating mainly on rhetoric. At times, the audience becomes a text that is to be re-constructed. The role played by the audience in any kind of mediated communication has also been discussed in the theories relating to media and communication.

With a specific focus on rhetoric, some, such as Walter Ong, have suggested that the audience is a construct made up by the rhetoric and the rhetorical situation the text is addressing. Others, such as Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor, have said writers and speakers actually can target their communication to address a real audience. Some others, such as Ede and Lunsford, try to mingle these two approaches and create

situations where audience is "fictionalized", as Ong would say, but in recognition of some real attributes of the actual audience ("Audience Theory").

Apart from Audience theory, there is also yet another disciplinary approach towards the interpretation of television narratives. This approach that focuses on the reception of a narrative and its interpretation made by the audience in comprehending the meaning of a text is termed as Reception theory. This version of the reader response literary theory is generally referred to as audience reception. In mythological retellings too each revised telling reconstruct the pre-existing reality and conveys new ideas enabling every individual to interpret it in proportion to the way he/she receives it. This particular theory's origins can be traced from the work of Hans-Robert Jauss in the late 1960s. It was the cultural theorist Stuart Hall who came to be known as one among those principal proponents of reception theory. The theory first got developed in his essay *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* written in 1973. Almost all of the television narratives aim at evoking these theoretical aspects, and rely basically on the manner in which it is received and interpreted.

Let it be any text, it is not simply meant to be digested by the audience. Instead, every text is intended to make the readers ruminate upon what has been produced in front of them based on their socio political and cultural background. Hence the meaning behind each mythical television narrative here is not limited within the text itself. Their meanings are meant to cross the

boundaries agreeably to the readers'/audience's relation with the text. These televisual forms of narratives are comprehended and interpreted by means of audience reception and are re-constructed within themselves paving way for the construction of new reality that resorts to meet contemporary needs and affairs. The sort of communication enabled by these televisual narratives becomes models for the multiple significations it facilitates.

These aforesaid kinds of studies related to television viewing have gradually got incorporated with in the Television studies. When it comes to the notion of textual analysis, television studies also show affinities towards film studies. At times it is included with media studies too. Film studies stand for those that are concerned with the creation of film theory and that acts as a conceptual framework to find the relationship between film and reality. It is also a critical approach to film as an art rather than dealing with the technical aspect of it. In the case of mythological televisual narratives too this same conceptual framework has already been developed to sort out the relationship and connection of televisual narratives with reality.

These facts have resulted in having multiple and unique disciplinary and theoretical perspectives in the case of approaching the televisual narratives as a text or subject to be explored. There are as many ways as possible for approaching it since television is the abode of hybridity; let it be cultural, lingual, social, culinary, political and national. Apart from the interdisciplinary approaches to the perception of televisual narratives or television in general, there are certain other discussions going on based on

the mode of interpreting, comprehending and understanding its various conceptions from an entirely different point of view offered by the difference in political and methodological identification of the narratives. The strategy behind each visual narrative is contained within a pre-established framework of numerous constructions.

While dealing with television narratives, certain studies have opined that,

While the television is on for large amounts of time in the average house hold, attention is very rarely truly focused on it. In fact, most of us make choices over which shows to watch attentively and what we can treat as wallpaper T.V. (“Introduction into Media Education”).

Mythology plays a major role in constructing the contemporary Indian social background through popular television narratives. This narrative strategy has now gathered attention of a wide array of heterogeneous and multicultural audience with its unique plot structure enabling Indian popular television narrative to base its narrative background on the traditional Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

Indian mythology has widely taken its different tellings in television narratives in the form of short films, feature films, international co-productions, animated feature films, animated series, performed series in

regional languages, performed films and so on. Targeting mainly on mythological stories and their related shows, television narratives had gained wide popularity in serving as an appropriate medium that imposes domestic and cultural consciousness on its popular audience. Being a self-reflective medium that mirrors the significant functions, daily affairs, subject matters, practical limits, social constraints, domestic norms, political conventions, religious struggles, behavioural goals, progressive elements and functional parameters, the visual narratives telecasted through television cross borders of national economy.

Popular films and television series tell stories in an entertaining, easily comprehensible fashion. They seem simple, yet often the audience must keep track of several characters, multiple plot lines, motifs, and thematic meanings. Television viewers often face the additional challenge of frequent interruptions – for commercials, for week-long gaps between episodes, and even for stretches of time between seasons. Yet they manage to keep track of not only a single long-running narrative, but often several simultaneously (Thompson, ix).

While dealing with the basic and fundamental essentials of storytelling across an extensive range of media, a more sophisticated Narrative theory helps in the systematic analysis, mutual understanding and accurate comprehension of the related tools and techniques involved in storytelling. The key concern behind narrative theory is to study if a narrative can be considered

as a way of understanding of the individual life and experience. Narrative theorists, study how each narrative is self-reflective of the people targeted.

The beginning of Narrative theory can be traced back from the basic assumption that each narrative is a fundamental approach to human psychology for raking up those primary essentials of individual experience, behavioural patterns and day today affairs. It is also influenced by the passage of time along with the change in life patterns, conventional styles and actions. The theory focuses on the study of the varied nature and structure of a narrative. In addition, it analyses the distinctive aspects in each kind of narrative with respect to the techniques, effects, styles and strategies employed by it to address the common mass. The diversity of the narratives available today throws light on the growing concerns regarding the contemporary political scenario and social background. Each televisual narrative is a telling of the society as a whole irrespective of its existence, origin and state of being.

In any medium, a narrative can be thought of as a chain of events occurring in time and space and linked by causes and effects. . . . The basic principle of the Hollywood cinema is that a narrative should consist of a chain . . . that is easy for the spectator to follow. . . . The glory of the Hollywood system lies in its ability to allow its finest scriptwriters, directors, and other creators to weave an intricate web of character, event, time, and space that can seem transparently obvious (Thompson,10).

Mythology in television narratives serves as a justifying tool of contemporary society. The images from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been employed to point to the possible ways to interpret gods as one among the popular mass. As far as television is concerned, it has got an affinity towards modernity and everyday life.

No other art genre mirrors the psyche of Indians and does the popular film: the cinema is a temple, a psychiatric clinic, a parliament, and a court of law and of course, these in themselves are for them a great source of entertainment (Valanciunas).

Filming mythological narratives is a powerful tool that paves the way for cultural transformation. Often it acts as a medium to rethink and revise through graphics, animations, casts and costumes. The prime time of television is now at the brim of gaining wide popularity in these animated and performed series on mythical characters, legends, gods their family and so on. The mythological stories it retells and the ways in which it is filmed marks the current happenings and cultural traits of the society. As a narrative strategy, television narratives are performed to appeal to the audience.

The gods and the legendary figures have now returned with a full-fledged modern setup in their lifestyles and actions. Gods are seen with aliens, and at times with other human beings and characters. The new *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* have marked their grand entries through these modern gods with sheer uniqueness in employing and mastering science and technology

including modern weapons. In their animated versions and performed versions, these gods have by now captured the minds of the audience. They take conscious effort to plot against the evils to bring about world peace and unity. These timeless tales are now being brought into various other forms too, as cartoon series and advertisements.

Targeting an audience of varied age group, culture and language, these new versions have gathered a greater appeal by its mass viewers and they are the living evidences for the culture, form, society and age in which they are reframed. Like that of the ancient tales, these modern renderings too have numerous mythical elements that carry the story throughout. Irrespective of where the spectators are based, these mythical television narratives are available in any language and culture. They were simultaneously appealing to both regional and religious audience. For the special attention and appreciation, many newly added stories were also incorporated during the casting of the narratives. Efforts have also been taken to maintain and recapture the very essence and morale of these mythological stories. In addition, these latest modern gods and legends have marked their entry into the big budget and glamorous budgets and many of the channels got benefited with extravagant budgets due to its wide acceptance and mass popularity.

These reframed epics presenting drama, action, heroism, wars, betrayal, and corruption made the viewers focus their attention more on questions. It also imparted into them, their quest for reasons. Hence these reframing enabled the narratives to go beyond conventional limitations, cutting

across regional, cultural and socio political frontiers. As a result, these far reaching stories could mark their own space in the television market by facilitating its dubbings in multiple languages. By now, they are also attempting to bring out cultural narration incorporating each culture's beliefs, traits and so on. Apart from this each story grows with its new forms. In spite of these stories' attempt to hoard collections, they also aim for a critical reading to have a different experience.

Indian television has been ruled by the vast growing trends in Mythological programs. This tremendous and widespread popularity of these shows has been keeping track of the audience's tastes, whims and fancies. It was *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* that got first aired on the National channel of Doordarshan during the late 80s. These two magnificent performed mythological series marked the beginning of a significant trend in the contemporary tellings of the epics in popular culture. Both these epical series could aesthetically recreate thousands of years old social situations, historical and political contexts, public space and cultural dimensions. Hence the characteristic fashion of mythological shows began with the advent of these shows- Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* and B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharat*.

Aired on DD National during the years 1987-8, this Indian television series, based on the age old Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* had gathered momentum in captivating the viewers of all age groups alike. Directed by Ramanand Sagar, *Ramayan* could catch sight of millions of viewers with its enthralling narrative features, regional backgrounds, popular language, elaborate and appropriate costumes, characteristic and pleasing appearance and everyday

situations. The show bases its narrative on Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmana*. *Ramayan* had an overall of 78 episodes in a single season with a running time of 35 minutes. The series chronicled the episodes of Rama's fourteen years of exile described in the epic *Ramayana*. It got re-telecasted at the time of India's lockdown during the pandemic of Corona virus and the series could create a path breaking record of having the most watched TV show ever in the world.

Mahabharat, by B.R. Chopra consisted of ninety four episodes and was aired between 1988 and 1990 in the National channel of Doordarshan. The series was based on the original story of the Vyasa *Mahabharata* with a running time of sixty minutes. This is the most eminent series ever produced based on the *Mahabharata*. There was a spin-off series that followed the *Mahabhart* series named the *Mahabharat Katha Part II* which narrated the left out segments of the previous series. *Mahabharat* became one among those well-heeled television series ever produced in the history of Indian television. During its re - telecast in the 2020 Corona lockdown, it came to be appraised as the second most watched Indian TV show after Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*. Both *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* series became the most successful twin television series based on the epic of the same name in the history of Indian television.

The reason behind the popularity of mythological television shows over literary mythological narratives is simply because of the dual experience of the interlaced video and the corresponding audio it provides. Mythological

characters, gods, goddesses, anti-gods and the like have been overpowering the entire television shows since 1987. This is just due to people's love and affinity towards gods and the stories related to them. Beginning from the very age old oral tradition of storytelling, mythological stories have now attained a position in every nook and corner of people's life. Such shows facilitated the movement of the holy figures from their holy abodes to the earthly beings, especially to their drawing rooms. These stories have been passed on by means of performing arts such as dance, theatre and musical theatre, historical manuscripts, musical compositions, Kathakali and so on.

Unlike those retold mythological literary narratives that seek to incorporate traditional, cultural and religious revival in every walk of life and re-construct the pre-existing realities, these performed television series evoke human feelings and thoughts by means of its innate relation to human perceptions and cognitions. The visual as well as the audio effect presented by these television shows is enthralling in such a way to get hold of the audience's inner psyche. It induces socio cultural revival to them in all walks of life.

Apart from *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*, there are a quite number of television series based on Indian theology and mythology airing in different channels. Their dubbed versions are also available in various regional languages. Siddarth Kumar Tewarey's 2016 series *Bal Krishna*, Amit Das and Anup Chakraborty's 2016 Bengali series *Bhakter Bhogobaan Shri Krishna*, Nikhil Sinha's 2011 series *Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev*, Bhushan Patel and Mukesh Singh's 2011 series *Dwarkadheesh– Bhagwaan Shree Krishna*,

Anand Kumar's 2013 series *Mahabharat*, Ravi Chopra's 1997 series *Mahabharat Katha*, Anand Sagar's 2008 series *Ramayan*, a remake of the 1987 series, Mukesh Singh's 2012 series *Ramayan: Sabke Jeevan Ka Aadhar*, Rashmi Sharma's 2015 series *Santoshi Maa*, Dheeraj Kumar's 2000 series *Shree Ganesh* and many more.

Among the aforementioned television series, some of them got re aired during the 2020 Covid- 19 lockdown and a few are still being premiered in certain regional channels. It is observed that Indian television's massive appeal is due to its capacity to emerge as a wide network in captivating each and every viewer of it, especially the middle class family. The role it plays in the remodelling of the societal practises, prevailing social issues, contemporary political affairs and domestic matters are praiseworthy. Let it be any kind of show, television has got a magnificent power to transform whatever that comes in its path.

The perfect lingo it adopts, the colourful attires it assigns to the actors and actresses, the wonderful appearance it produces and the appropriate mood it creates add to the effect of telling those age old epics in a new fashion comfortable for the contemporary viewers. Though each telling in the television series is a visual replica of the thousands of year old written texts, they are retold to foster modern thoughts and aspirations. These televisual narratives are relatively comprehensible mode of significations with a critical approach. The flexibility of the language used, the availability of the once consecrated figures in the drawing rooms and the plot's deviation in the

contexts and the narrative space have given rise to an entirely new way of promoting the ancient stories with new intuitions.

Unlike these performed series, the animated mythological series intend to focus mainly on the child viewers. The animated mythological gods are portrayed as one among their friends but with certain magical powers, skills and potential to safeguard their dear ones. These animated mythological series deviate from that of the performed series in narration, plot, structure and representation. Almost all the mythological gods and characters portrayed in these animated series are the humanised versions of those in the epics.

The character Arjun in the series *Arjun - Prince of Bali* is a boy of eleven year old prince of Bali, a province of Indonesia. Set in the imaginary kingdom of Dholakpur, *Chhota Bheem* portrays the life of a nine year old brave, intelligent and strong boy named Bheem. The series is based on Bheem and his team's indulgence in critical issues and problems. Rather than being an adventurous movie focussing on the tastes of the children, *Chhota Bheem* celebrates the baby version of the mighty Pandava brother Bheem in bringing together the reality and myth in the epic.

Roll No 21 is the modern retelling based on the rivalry between Krishna and his uncle Kansa. The character Kris is portrayed as the incarnation of Lord Krishna and he is often called as 'Neela Bandar' by his friends. Kris being an anthropomorphised entity shows traces of Lord Krishna and performs his activities. He is shown in blue colour and is fond of butter. The series also

include the incarnations of certain other mythological gods and legendary figures.

The animated action television series *Shiva*, narrates the story of a young boy of the same name who lives in an imaginary town called Vedas, with his grandparents. Endowed with supernatural powers, intelligence and bravery he defeats a lot of villains with his skills. This nine year old boy owns a bike that can fly. *Krishna and Balram* is an action cum adventurous animated series that features the life and adventures of Lord Krishna and his brother Balram along with Radha and other friends. The story revolves around an eight year old Krishna and his nine year old brother Balram. *Little Krishna* is based on the childhood of Lord Krishna, often called as the darling of Vrindavan.

Like the aforesaid animated series, almost all of the mythological animated series mainly aspire to make the spectators get into the world of a more friendly gods and characters, who wilfully move from their spiritual empires to the world of popular mass seeking to interfere in their social and political affairs and meeting their needs. They portray mythological figures and gods with the same spirit of divinity but with increased accessibility. Each telling is labelled as 'retelling' for every telling is unique with primary concerns of the epics.

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

novelists of our time, exposed as they are to global influences, reinterpretations of episodes from these epics 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 (Mukherjee, 34).

When it comes to mythological television films, the situation changes again as far its narrative style is concerned. Most of the performed mythological films focussed mainly on the legendary figures than that of the gods and goddesses. These performed mythological films utilised a particular episode from the epics. At times they employ any one of the mythological characters' life too. They excelled in re-presenting those past situations again in this present scenario adding more frills of contemporary thought to the plot, story, and narrative space in a finely appealing manner with an end to re-create the element of divinity behind those characters and gods in the epics. Unlike the usual practices in those above detailed animated series, these mythological movies do not re-construct the pre-existing reality or distort any already fixed condition and notion. Instead, they re-generate those age old stories before the viewers and let them access the once restricted freedom of accessing those characters.

Having Euhemeristic representations of ancient history, these performed series also contain real life films with an incarnated being in the form of one of the characters. Some of them are eventful narratives of the mythological stories, mainly focussing on a specific mythological figure or

God. Such films incorporate a storyteller who tells the stories in front of a crowd, like that of the traditional mode of storytelling. The events that are narrated by the storyteller are also shown parallel to the story. In certain films, there occur discussions and interpretations among the audience who have gathered to hear the story, based on the events narrated by the actor or character in the film. Such films are examples for the ones that incorporate popular interventions.

Animated mythological films are the next category where mythological stories have been utilised to create the narratives. Unlike performed mythological television movies and films, animated films are more like a modern take of the ancient mythological stories and characters with newly created events. Their prime end is to evoke fun, rational thought and moral values. Pankaj Sharma's animated musical feature film series *Bal Ganesh* is the modern rendering of the tale of Lord Ganesh, his birth, childhood, pranks and finally his elevation to the title of the lord of all 'devas' and the lord of obstacles. Narrated beautifully by his rat companions, this feature film resonates between the conventional and modern culture of worshipping, beliefs, and practices. This mythological narrative in episodes showcases Ganesh's mastery over handling the evils- 'rakshasas'. The film also includes songs along with background scores providing a wider perspective in rethinking.

Bal Ganesh begins when a rat dressed like an ancient scholar tries to open a huge book that seems to be sacred in its appearance. This scene is

followed by a song, a sort of hymn praising Lord Ganesh. In the background, the rat Mooshak narrates the story of Lord Ganesh from the very beginning of his birth including the stories of Lord Shiva and the *Kailas*. Ganesh's skating along the snowy Himalayas with his friend Mooshak, their conversation and dance with other rat mates add to the mood of the film in depicting the pranks of Lord Ganesh. His journey on the back of Mooshak and flight through the sky chasing the rishi Vishwamitra, and his brother Muruka's flight on his vehicle, the peacock contributed to the viewers' fascination regarding the concept of the attribution of particular vehicle to some gods.

The narrator Mooshak is at times shown dressed up as per the climatic conditions, for instance, in sweaters in snowy areas. Towards the end, a car is shown coming to a bungalow and a rat with a cooling glass got down from it. He was having an over coat with some currencies both in his hands and in the suit. He then says "this is my new bungalow and new car (1:21:29). The rat who comes in the car is of course the narrator himself, to tell yet another story of Ganesh. Each set of stories and incidents have been set in such a way to generate some moral ideologies along with the intention to evoke fun. Ganesh's fantasy towards food was also exaggerated to the point of humour in the incident that happened in Kuber's mansion.

Bal Ganesh 2 begins with the same huge mansion in the first part of the film. A few rats leap out from the holes there in the courtyard. Certain other rats dressed in dhoti and shawl came out from the house and greet each other

as 'Sri Ganeshaya Namaha'. Then a car came to the bungalow and a rat named Suit Boot came out of the car and they all began their conversation.

Rat 1 : He has gone mad. What are you doing?

Suit Boot : Hai ! How is it going guys?

Rat 1 : Look! Here comes our super hero...

Suit Boot : Hai guys!!

Rat 1 : Hei dude! You invited us to your place and then you yourself make a grant late entrance? We are fed up with your showing off all the time. This is too much.

Suit Boot : Hei! Chill man! Relax. You know how Bal Ganesh taught Kubera a lesson for his showing off habit? After witnessing that I don't think I want to show off anymore. That's just the reason for I have invited you guys over here. Otherwise I would never handle such nuisance like you. Just look at yourselves man...

Rat 1 : Come on guys. Let's go out of here. We didn't come here to be insulted and treated like this.

Suit Boot : Hei guys... Don't take it to your heart man. I was just joking my friends. Come on...

Rat 2 : Please don't crack jokes like this out in public. People

will think all mice are dumb as you. Ok? So just give it a rest. Come on...now tell us why are you so late.

Suit Boot : I thought it would be nice if we could hang over and go for a nice long drive in my car. But you are such 'paani pooppers' that you guys just don't want to get out of your house. Who knows from which side of the bed you wake up from in. You have turned my beautiful garden into a hell hole. What is this?

Rat 2 : Anyway, whatever...get on with it. Why have you called us here?

Suit Boot : Listener!! Our dear Lord Ganesh and our ancestor Mooshak Raj has done a great job in the film *Bal Ganesh*. Superb film right!!? I mean...never mind the kids. Even the kids' parents and grandparents were seen watching different different stories. Right now we can't get enough of them man. So they are demanding more and more stories. All they threatened to ban all mice from their kitchen forever! So guys...should we give into the demand and tell them more stories?

All rats together : Yes yes we should.

Suit Boot : This would make the parents happy and the kids happy too. And once kids are happy, then not just us, the whole world would be happy. What do you say?

Rat 2 : Ya sure. Why not? We all have a plan. You remember.

Don't you? All those adventurous stories of Bal

Ganesh...(0:03:12- 0:04:46)

The entire story in the first part is briefly shown in the form of a song played in the very beginning of this film. Ganesh's dance with the rats by holding a 'dumbru' is also amusing. The rat Suit Boot continues the story after that. The informal gestures, expressions and words they used in addressing each other, their attires and lifestyle are some of the instances of Anthropomorphism. These rats are the anthropomorphized replica of the common mass and they have been exemplified and personified here in the film, with modern interpretations regarding their language, lingo and attire. In between the incidents and dialogues, the food 'modak' is often uttered and stressed to focus on the traditional culinary consciousness of the society. The rats often interrupt to make their own opinions based on the incidents and happenings. There is an instance regarding the making of Ganesh's DVD and its distribution and sales in the entire cat colony.

Rat 2 : No need to worry! I have an idea. Now when they

release the DVDs of this film, you can distribute copies in the entire cat colony for free. May be then they have a change in attitude.

Suit Boot : What crab! Why should I distribute DVDs for free?

You guys think that I'm the only mouse they want to eat? Are they related to your body order something? If they are to be distributed, we all should do it together. But by the way your suggestion is a pretty intelligent one...I have to admit.

Rat 2 : Speaking of intelligence, I remember another story of

Ganesh, which was narrated to me by your grandfather.

Suit Boot : What? You mean my grandfather told you this story?

Then why didn't he tell it to me too?

Rat 1 : I think you better ask him that question. Didn't you

hear? He said it was a story about being intelligent.

You wonder he didn't share it with you. He knows how intelligent you are (0:31:35-0:31:50).

Each event portrayed in the film contributes to the multi-faceted possibilities hidden in mythology and the epics. Besides, the director makes his own interpretations regarding certain incidents and they are again open for

further discussions. The lyrics as well as the music of the song in the film are mixed with modern English refrains and ancient hymns to reinforce a broad understanding of the concerns for television effects and foster the potential of television narratives to influence socialization and acculturation. In the end, all the rats say good bye and promise to come up with yet another exciting story of Ganesh. The film ends with the song “GanappathivappaMauriya”.

The potential of mythological television narratives to produce meaning has strengthened ideological values by reinforcing prevailing concepts and beliefs in society. The importance of television narratives in the socialization process has led to an investigation into how a specific behavior might be perpetuated in society by the manner it is maintained in television narratives. The impact of television shows on society has been represented in such a way as to focus the prime attention on the textual analysis. These examples show that people have concerns regarding the underlying cultural norms for they are changing in a way that could be pernicious to the society as a whole and that television plays a significant part in these changes.

People may mistakenly believe that the activities depicted on television are natural and normal, and they may become ideologically enslaved to a pattern of conduct seen frequently on television.

Television is seen as realistic because it reproduces a dominant sense of reality through the conventions it contains which viewers are able to recognize and from which they are able to construct meaning (Fiske, 21).

These fast growing trends in mythical fictionalization through television narratives are especially due to the wide array of imaginary characters it offers. Each character can be read and interpreted and even broaden into multiple stories. Their narratives became an appropriate platform to tread on for the gods engage with the modern language to narrow the gap between belief structures and class constructions. The stories are rewritten in a more convenient manner in order to balance between the past and the present, not with an intention to distort history but with an aim to replenish it further. Apart from its re-presentations, Indian mythology is spread apart beyond all borders of gender, class and caste. The ultimate end of such narratives is to provide space for those so called 'outcasts' who were often denied access to the mainstream.

The presentations of animated mythical series and performed mythical series vary significantly as they get removed from the epics. While animated films and series aim at the visual excitement and enjoyment, these performed films and serials focus more on domestic audience and connect them with day to day affairs. The viewers on the other hand go after events such as an ever weeping woman, a protective man, a peaceful yet problematic family, the appearance of some villains to twist the scene, destruction of the antiheroes and the regaining of the peace and restoring the happiness.

The existing mythological versions of Lord Shiva, Krishna and Hanuman include *Mahabharata* on Star Plus, *Hara Hara Mahadeva* on Star Suvarna Channel, *Ramayan* on Star Plus, *Kannante Radha* on Asianet,

Kailasanadhan on Asianet, *Seethayanam* on Asianet, *Lava Kusa* on Surya and so on. Some are retold through the eyes of females. While the animated mythical films anthropomorphize the narrative, performed series euhemerize the same. Every set of mythological series follow a structured pattern. However sequentialised its telecasting would be, there is always a causality that connects each part with an end to framing a meaningful plot. When it comes to the narration in popular mythological film narratives and mythical television series, they share a common feature of telling stories in an amusing and agreeable fashion. They are all transparent and easily understandable. Though they appear to be simple, the audience has to keep track on their dramatic swings and structural motifs.

There is a generation out there who requires relevance in all aspects of the mythological stories. Some view it rationally while the others accept it as sacred ideologies. For those who go after perceptions and interpretations, stories have to be told differently. So, the makers were conscious while dealing with the dialogues, look and feel, casting, costumes, visuals and graphics. Furthermore, along with the portrayal of these popularly known gods and goddesses, certain other deities have also been rediscovered such as Santhoshi Maa. Though this character has got a mention in the mythology as the daughter of Ganesh, she is not a figure that is discussed in detail. The Hindi blockbuster during the 1970s made this character prominent through their featuring of *Jai Santhoshi Maa* and thus she was worshipped by its viewers. Along with the deification of new legendry figures, certain conventional rituals such as

‘Rakhi’ and ‘Rakshabhandan’ have also been made popular and well received by the audience.

As far as modern retellings and fictionalization through television is concerned, Mediatization is not an alien notion. Mediatization of culture and everyday life encompasses all sorts of changes incorporated by the media in presenting culture and everyday life. It is all about the role and influence of media in framing the cultural practices and everyday life of the individual and society. The very term is applicable not only for culture, but also for mythology. Mediatization of mythology is the situation where media interferes and reframes mythology aimed at re-presenting it as a novel aspect in the form of television narratives. It is also the way in which culture is redefined by media and is termed as the “broader consequences of media and communication for everyday life across social space” (Kaun, 50). In addition, it serves as a representational model in projecting culture by including the changes made by media. Besides, it has by now entered into almost every aspect of human interconnections. Moreover, within the analytical framework of media, culture has always been marketed and twisted by its mythology and history.

In addition to globalization and commercialization of culture, we are also experiencing a mediatization of culture, which has brought both everyday culture and high arts into new social contexts. This not only makes them

available to a larger portion of society but also transforms the very nature of these cultural practices (Kaun, 54).

There is an innate relation between Euhemerism and Apotheosis. The views of the ancient Greek mythographer Euhemerus was mainly based on the elevation of men, especially those having power and authority, say kings and priests, into gods. In theology, apotheosis is associated with belief and in art it is more like a genre. Euhemerus held the notion that almost all of the gods were a result of the veneration of such kings to divine beings by means of apotheosis after their death. In Indian mythology also, this relation had been experimented but not exactly like what had really done in the case with Greek mythological kings and priests. Though there are cases where mythological legends and characters got venerated into the status of gods through apotheosis, this veneration is not by means of deification, but by means of anthropocentric incarnations where certain gods descend to earth as human beings. Unlike literary narratives, the fundamental motive behind television narratives is to make those mythological figures accessible to the common mass in every possible way.

Euhemerus saw myth as history in disguise, where the gods being worshipped were originally living men, elated in this way because of some great feat of theirs, or their splendid virtue, perhaps sometimes simply because of all the power they had when alive. Men, who had been glorified in life, were by later generations deified (Stenudd, 65).

This attempt by Euhemerus of rationalising mythology in historical terms later on came to be known as “historical theory”, in a more recent literary work based on myth by Thomas Bulfinch- *Bulfinch's Mythology*. This work is mainly associated with Greek mythology, Roman mythology, Arthurian and Charlemagne legends. Euhemerus' supposition of myths as mere exaggeration of historical accounts when they get retold in different scenario, place and time became self-reflective of cultural mores and practices. Likewise, these mythological television narratives become self-reflective of the historical accounts of the ancient past when they get re-presented in the popular culture.

These wide arrays of categories break the impediments of class consciousness and discriminations with a motive to revive ancient religious atrocities and forced practices. The time when people began to put down historical details into record, they incorporated such renderings in the mythology of their time. So, when it comes to the retelling of that particular mythology, the notion of New Historicism really matters. New Historicism approaches mythical retelling by means of its author's historical context and time and the work's relation to the particular author who has created it. Examining the literary work in a wider historical context that has influenced the work's plot, narrative strategy, theme, and storyline, New Historicism goes deeply into the cultural contexts in which a work has been created. New Historicism examines how far a work is reflective of the author's social context and circumstances.

While attempting a full-fledged examination and study of the newly retold versions, the cultural history as well as the social situation that facilitated the creation of that particular work has also to be given prime focus. As a result, the text tends to reveal itself without any voluntary means. Each mythical narrative and the way of understanding it is always with respect to the shift in time and space. The narratives critically portray the context in which history is created and inculcated in each telling.

Since new historicism expends most of its energies on identifying and exposing these different historical epistemes, and the historical evolution of conceptions of the state, individual, culture, family, etc., it is easy to see how it has represented for many commentators a turn to history (Brannigan, 15).

As stated by Louis Montrose, it is the “textuality of history and the historicity of texts” (53). This concept is also influenced by Derridian idea of Deconstruction, where literary texts are read closely to identify the places where it has got knocked down by itself during retellings. Each retelling is a sort of reduction into its constituent parts to analyse it individually. According to J.Hills Miller, “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air” (Mambrol).

When epical and mythological stories are rehashed into narratives they get fused into 'cultural myths' that has been already grounded in the minds of people. Cultural myths can be any deep rooted idea, concept, practice, behaviour, custom and mannerism in people of varied groups. They are the fundamental principles or truths to be believed and followed. The age old Mythologies, legends and folklores have already formed a belief system and cultural practise in the minds of people. These practises and beliefs coincide with that of the newly established literary theories and narratives associated with mythology, epics and legends.

Most of the retold narratives compose an exceptionally new form of reality that goes hand in hand with each one's life and experience. It is the situation where one tells the story of another or at times their life as a whole without altering the course of action, but with a different dimension of socio cultural environment. It also incorporates newly established ideologies and mind-sets.

When one tells another's story with some involvement, one feels almost compelled to add a bit of one's own thinking about aspects of it in some form: comments, observations, interpretations and the like. It is especially so when the story is as comprehensive and profound as *Mahabharata* and is also one with which one has grown up and which has become a significant part of one's cultural identity. (Pattanaik ix)

Each television narrative that focuses mainly on the retelling of mythology presents essential concerns regarding social relations, power and practices. Each telling is understood by means of its difference with each other and the source text. The production of meaning is also thus based on this difference in depicting human lives. It is through this interplay of the differences that each construct is being created. These already created differences get re-constructed by means of the socio cultural contexts in which it is contained. It is neither an analysis, nor a method nor a critique. Instead it is a form of comprehension, interpretation and understanding based on one's perception.

Both deconstruction and retelling are complementary to each other for retellings mostly rely on deconstructions since they de-construct the already existing notions, practices, social systems, customs and beliefs. A particular text is taken and is subjected to be read outside it, based on the existing cultural background in which it is being created.

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 (Rog, 123).

Almost all of the retold works, both literary and television narratives are subjective and each viewer relates it with their personal experiences and backgrounds. Rather than the individual construction of the meanings,

mythological retellings are more like constructions based on the current social as well as cultural scenario in which the particular work has been rewritten. Hence the meaning of a particular text can go beyond its literal sense for the meaning involves experiences and context. “Retelling, when used in all of its forms, requires social engagement as the participants are involved in reading, writing, talking and listening” (Stoicovy).

Each television narrative that employs epics, lores, legends and mythologies becomes a replica of individual choices having underlying elements of socio political and cultural backgrounds. “Retelling also involves the integration and personalization of content, helping readers see how parts of the text interrelate and how they mesh with one's own experience” (Morrow, 137). The authors/directors transform the already existing narratives into a more context related and reader friendly constructions.

Each narrative varies significantly in genre, structure and style. Most of them oscillate between the traditional and the modern. Some falls into the category of children's literature, while some are feminist revivalist attributions, targeting to topple down the conventional patriarchal system and social discrimination. The retold mythological television narratives in children's literature allow the child viewers to relate themselves with that of the events as well as the characterisation in the narratives. Nonetheless, “retellings prepare children for the real world where not everything is good or bad, and where the good does not always win over the bad. Therefore, the idea of the original must be preserved while retelling” (Mehrotra). The

mythological television narratives focussing on the reestablishment of socio political and cultural disparities also target the child viewers by incorporating symbolic frameworks of transcendentalism. This resulted in the creation and production of mythological narratives such as *Chhota Bheem*, *Gathothkach*, *Roll No 21* and *Bal Ganesh*.

Myth in children's literature can open up imaginative new realms that allow child readers to escape from their mundane lives, follow and identify with a male or female hero that battles monsters and demons, before returning home victorious. It can help them to make sense of their place in the world, of birth and death, of the move from childhood to adulthood, and of good and evil ("Myth and Children's Literature").

These narratives also expose the prevailing concerns such as social as well as political injustices, gender inequalities, and hierarchical discriminations, cultural distortions, lost hegemony, individual disharmonies, revolutions, caste-class riots, gender struggles, sexuality, violence, atrocities, revolts, moral disintegrations and so on. The growth of mythological stories into television narratives are based on certain elementary theoretical and methodological frameworks apart from its commercial end of enhancing entertainment.

Most of the mythical narratives draw the analytical perspectives from those prominent theories as well as literary devices. These approaches explore

narratives' association with the receptor's culture and experience. Besides, the language as well as the socio cultural set up of Indian epics and mythology is being altered into the language and socio cultural scenario of the viewers. This process of 'refraction' is introduced by Andre Lefevere. It is the practise of seeing mythological narratives as refractions and he explains it as the situation or the process that identifies contemporary novels as rewritings of the old mythological texts into the language of the modern readers. In his *Translating Literature, Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, Lefevere presumes that,

Refraction is the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work. The source text is altered, rewritten and refracted due to poetological, ideological and patronage related constraints that suits the receptor culture (Lefevere, 235-36).

Lefevere's most prominent contribution was in comparative literary studies especially in translation studies. It is he who propounded that translation is a form of rewriting. By this, he literally meant that any text created based on another text has got a natural affinity towards the source text in adopting some kind of ideology or poetics to a certain extent. The notion of 'rewriting' put forward by Lefevere shares a common platform with mythological 'rewriting'. For Lefevere, whatever that gets projected differently from the source text is meant to be refracted for the newly produced

version is the retold version of the former. He speaks, “rewriters create images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature” (5). Thus refraction leads to multiple angles of interpretation since it involves various sorts of receptions. These are certain ‘manipulation’ devices to let the work get exposed in a newly set framework.

Lefevere explains a refracted text to be that “text that has been processed for a certain audience (children, for example), or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology” (137). Almost all of the contemporary retellings are meant and designed for a particular audience, differing and deviating particularly in its dimensions. Later on, Lefevere reconsidered the notion of refraction to explain “the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work” (127).

In his *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere holds that, irrespective of the intention of the rewritings, they mirror certain ideology and mould literature to fit in a given time and space of the targeted social group along with introducing new events, ideas, tools, devices, history and so on.

Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can be the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation,

distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature are exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live (vii).

It is also observed that when historical as well as mythological stories are retold through television narratives, some of the storylines trivialize the underlying socio-economic issues of the times and highlights what seems to be interesting for the viewers. At times romance is given prime focus while dealing with historical nuances, apart from its socio-political and historical aspects. These multiple combinations in the present retelling of mythology are just one of the interpretations one might think of when looked upon from a different angle. Hence it is not a distortion of what had been told thousands of years ago. Even in television mythical narratives too the triumph of good over evil has been a consistent and constant theme. Thus as a result of the widening of the spectrum of mythology the gods as well as legendary figures move from their sanctified spheres to the human beings.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The texts which form the basis of the thesis brings forth the underlying concepts and apprehensions behind mythical retellings on the basis of the time and place in which it is created and recreated. The research dives extensively into the fields of such reworked texts and rakes up numerous aspects of contemporaneity from the ordinary people's lives and culture. The work also looks into how the authors frame the narratives in a fashion that is propelled by universal drives and features. Besides, it details how revisions function as a communicative device to reveal the happenings and persistent issues in the society and impart the essence and purpose of societal roles into the viewers through the realistic portrayal of the characters.

The study investigates the methods and perspectives for fictionalizing a story with an eye toward bringing the 'other' side to the forefront and scrutinizing the dominant powers behind all these subversive narrative strategies. Chiefly these narratives are found to be liberated from the shackles of those conventional and historical discriminations. Furthermore, it was discovered that such mythical fictions take the audience on a journey towards the defeated, marginalized, as well as the overlooked, aimed at breaking down socio-political, cultural, and hierarchical barriers that had been acting as an ever-present impediment to the amalgamation of individual castes, classes, and cultures. Hence the work also examines the ways in which these frontiers are

broken when the once venerated figures move closer to the human beings from their holy abode as one among them.

The study has brought in the significance of the reworked Indian myths and legends in the breaking of different cultural and sociopolitical shields by mapping and making a comprehensive record of them in contemporary literary and television narratives. In addition, the study examines current and futuristic inclinations in mythological reworking, as well as cultural connotations in mythical recasting. In the light of the texts selected for the study in literary and television narratives, it was discerned that the relevance of mythical revisitations and its capacity to act as a representative of contemporary life and experience of the overlooked, marginalised and female characters necessitates the transcending of the confines of traditional gender norms while simultaneously demonstrating and resisting the oppressions that continue today.

In *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, the first among the three literary narratives chosen for the study, Ravana and his empire are portrayed as those defeated beings who were purposefully silenced in order for the names of the victorious to be inscribed in gold in the pages of history. Neither Rama nor Ravana is glorified or vilified in the novel. Instead, it gives voice to the defeated asuras, particularly Ravana, the so called villainous figure in mythology. He had been silenced because he had been the loser. And for the first time in history, this narrative equipped the asuras to communicate their story to the readers. Thus *Asura* is regarded as a critique of the thwarted 'other

side' challenging the old paradigm and balancing both Rama and Ravana at the same time.

Asura reflects the universal truth through the character, Bhadra. He is that proletarian who represents the poor without basic needs, the farmer without a land of his own, the servant who gradually becomes a slave, the defeated warrior, the breadwinner who failed in life, the wretched who lacks a voice of his own and the impoverished. His reality is caught between the two extremes of good and bad. However, *Asura* bases the narrative on the platform of the muted group theory and showcases how retellings accept and affirm the truth behind multiple faiths while also teaching people to focus on all aspects of reality and life at the same time.

Ravana and his clan's muteness is a conspicuous instance of their inability to express themselves. The epic narrative which showcases the relationship between the dominant group devas and their subordinate asuras gets redefined and recreated here and the characters and events get expanded upon via subverting the dominant group's sole authority in the formulation of the language system, social norms and vocabulary. The members from the subordinate group, the asuras and the marginalised common folk like Bhadra found it tiresome to learn and use the dominant language to express themselves.

Thus, in documenting their life and experiences, the epic texts failed to detail them properly and it ended up only in the erosion and distortion of the images of these vanquished groups. As the dominant group ignores the voice

of the marginalized group and addresses only their part of the story, the latter's story gets overshadowed in history and is forced to lead a submissive life as a result. This recreation of a new Ravana by Neelakantan facilitates the breaking of individual limits between different hierarchical, cultural and socio-political boundaries.

Menaka's Choice explores the story of an apparently powerless apsara, Menaka, and the societal restraints and impositions that she faces. The narrative examines how she overcomes both sexual and forcible subjugations. She, like other submissive female characters, was denied her own voice and was simply supposed to obey and be a subordinate to the cunning Indra, who represents patriarchy. Though they were the heavenly blithes, all apsaras including Menaka were denied their own freedom of speech and the epics so comfortably ignored their power and importance.

What really matters is that *Menaka's Choice* is not merely a manifestation of femininity, but also an attribution of a valid position and personality to the frequently muted and disregarded characters. It genuinely determines the true self of those characters who were never given the chance to speak for themselves. The narrative also emphasizes patriarchal dogmas that existed in ancient mythology and sheds light on individuals who went unrecognized. In short, she dared to break free from the shackles of imposed identity, realizing that she was no longer a puppet in anyone's hands. These heroic acts, however, were not mentioned in any ancient epic for they deliberately ignored such events for the sake of patriarchy.

In essence, these feminist narratives could provide a fertile ground for contemporary practices and serve as a compelling paradigm for women's collective awareness. Rather than seeing them as archetypes of oppression, such retellings opted for a progressive shift in humanity's general attitude towards those lost figures. *Menaka's Choice* examines how feminist revisionist mythology contributes to the advancement of the depiction of all female experiences inside patriarchal narratives. With the growth of feminist revisionist movements and feminist consciousness, the general public could thus witness new interpretations of mythical stories told by contemporary authors. The relevance of Menaka's reconstruction of identity and her competency to act as a representative of any female overturns the typical gender roles while simultaneously manifesting and rejecting the kind of discrimination that still exists today.

The graphic novel *Adi Parva* as a work of art incorporates the public's perceptions and opinions, it disrupts the social constraints that have been discriminating the public on the basis of class and sexuality. The story provided a provision for the people to delve deeply into the vast array of possibilities that lie beneath each mythical story. The people also participate in conversations based on the stories given by the sutradhaar, the thread bearer. *Adi Parva* has the potential to inspire readers because the style and format of this graphic novel are so diverse. The novel is visually narrated, and the substance, subjects, and target audiences differ greatly from other comics.

By sticking on to the main tales of the *Mahabharata* epic, this legendary reworking sought to break down the shields of conventional

dogmas. On the whole, the story is infused with more characters from real life for to enhance the experience of retelling. The villagers were made to intervene themselves into the storyline and provide alternate expositions, as well as ask questions and express opinions based on the events unfolding in front of them. *Adi Parva* tackles the rational areas of societal achievements by providing philosophical explanations for each story offered in the source text.

The novel established the fact that handling fictional and remarkable mythical characters demands a fluid medium and style, impressive and thought provoking ambience where the threads can be floated easily. With regard to all these requirements, this mythical fiction could create fleeting thoughts and lively impressions among the readers. By making the characters sensible and events momentous rather than objectifying them on the basis of certain facts and maxims, *Adi Parva* bridges the divine and earthly beings with the aid of the sutradhaar.

When it comes to television narratives, it was the progressive shift in storytelling techniques and narrative structures found in literature and media that has led to its evolution. Television as a visual narrative becomes the comprehensive exposition of popular culture. Popular television narratives in general, adhere to certain storytelling conventions and both television series and films deal with psychologically developed characters that mirror the inner psychology of people and their lives. It also inculcates loosely structured narrative framework, and story threads. These fundamental and crucial parts were found to be dealing with some potential situations with intellectual coherence, deft tactics, and practical prudence.

The act of filming legendary narratives has been seen as a strong weapon for cultural transformation. Through graphics, animations, casts, and costumes, it frequently serves as a medium for rethinking and revising. The gods and legendary figures have reappeared with fully modernized lifestyles and behaviors. With their utter contemporaneity in employing and conquering science and technology and including novel attributes, the new *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* legends have made their spectacular entrance through the medium of television shows. On the whole, Gods in new shapes have caught the imaginations of audiences in both animated and live performances. Such shows made it easier for the holy figures to travel from their heavenly abodes to the earthly beings.

The stories are reconstructed in a more convenient manner to achieve a better balance between the past and the present, with a goal of reviving it further. The majority of authors who use mythology to reinforce it frequently make it less godly to encourage the involvement of popular mass. The retold versions of the ancient epics that are now available have been recreated in innovative ways, including previously unexplored areas having moral and emotional significance. Apart from its re-presentations, mythical fictions transcend all gender, class, and caste impediments. The ultimate goal of such narratives is to provide room for the so-called "outcasts" who are frequently excluded from mainstream society.

The thesis has also put forward the notion of mediatization in the filming of mythical narratives. Mediatization of culture and everyday life that adheres to how media portrays culture and daily life, is all about the media's

function and influence in shaping individual and societal cultural practices and everyday life. Not only does the term apply to culture, but also to mythology. The mediatization of mythology occurs when the media intervenes and reframes mythology to re-present it as a novel component in the form of television dramas. It also acts as a representational model for projecting culture by taking into account media developments.

In light of these facts, when myths and legends are re-presented through television narratives in popular culture, they become self-reflective of historical descriptions of the ancient past. With the goal of reviving age old religious atrocities and forced behaviours, these diverse categories break through impedes of class consciousness and prejudice. Individual discords, revolutions, caste-class riots, gender struggles, sexuality, brutality, atrocities, revolts and moral disintegrations are also being highlighted here. Hence these multiple combinations in the present literary and television retelling of mythology are not a distortion of what had been told thousands of years ago. They widen the spectrum of mythology and as a result the gods as well as legendary figures move from their sanctified domains to the ordinary people.

Every telling, as observed on the basis of the texts chosen for study, represents the time and place to which it belongs. Further, each telling has got its own symbolisms and imagery, as well as the key themes to be addressed. As a result, each story offers a critique of the current situation in its own form, style, pattern, and narrative approach. Almost all the legendary and epical texts focus solely on the magnificent aspects of every action, utterly ignoring the dark, suffocating side of the underdogs and the crushed. These texts on the

other hand, never let any God to be portrayed as raining blessings with light beams. Instead, all of the figures are re-created as human beings with a wide range of emotions and sensibilities. The narrative's fictitious descriptions, characters' emotional profiles, events' historical context, and the episodes' theatrical presentations set the tale free from stereotyped storytelling.

The retellings have revealed indiscriminating bigotry and unfairness based on one's class, sex, or gender. Such assertions are clear evidence of the reflection of sexism. Though sexism can harm anyone, it is more prevalent among female characters, particularly those who are neglected. In such narratives, this concept is linked to stereotypes and gender roles and their gender or sex has been considered as essentially inferior to the other. In certain cases, extreme sexism is perceived as encouraging sexual abuse, harassment, and other forms of sexual violence. It is gender discrimination which leads to sexism that causes people to lose their identities and become conscious about their sex differences.

The inventive endeavors of these narratives produce fruit in the shape of logical understanding. Apart from that, the tales treat each participant in each public sphere as a distinct entity when referring to them. Thus almost all mythical fictions have maintained their ability to influence the public as a realistic story. Furthermore, these mythological fictions, either literary or television reflect the fact that each revision raises an important point, if not a universal truth, about the power of perception. Upon analyzing the texts, it was made out that everything is a matter of perspective, including the conditions of various occurrences, the reality of every scenario, the truth behind each guilt,

the story behind every victory, and the aftermath of every defeat. They hold the capacity to turn anything upside down, regardless of what genre they belong to, what form they take, or where they are located. In addition, all stories are likely to deal with diverse topics and are emblematic of many social, economic, or cultural aspects of society.

These retellings are the perfect answer to what the epics overlooked while celebrating the victors' lives and actions. As a result, gods are shown as earthly beings deconstructing supernatural components and interventions to rake up socio-political and gender associations having contemporary relevance. Rather than being views and interpretations, these reworkings are 'constructions,' for they are the mythical adaptations of reality constructing one's position, identity and existence. As a result, the events are rebuilt to provide implications from real-life situations and it is apparent that the re-readings of these mythical tales are a result of or a mirror reflection of the time period in which they are set.

The thesis surmises that modern retellings have shattered the phallogocentric ideological frontiers, creating an alternative feminine discourse by placing women in a reframed community. Apart from the deliberate exclusion of the female characters, the beaten and the conquered, Indian mythologies serve only as the epitome of numerous colourful events of the heroes and champions. When these tales got recreated by contemporary artists, they were bestowed with a space and a voice of their own.

Modern interpretations are not extensions of the ancient past's constraints, but rather additions that incorporate a wide variety of manufactured identity. These restorations are not the fantastical creations of the past, but rather a step towards societal change. Although the recounted myths are the built-up narratives of ancient relics, they are in resonance with the existing ones. In essence, each story is designed to examine and reinterpret conventional morality and practices. Most retellings do not stray too far from the epic text in terms of historical details, but do so in terms of plot, narration, and characterizations. This is what constitutes plurality and their utmost end is to add a more scrupulous notion to mythology.

Reworkings of mythologies are primarily intended to demonstrate how specific mytho-religious motifs, symbolism, and metaphors function in these modern creations. It has already crossed religious bounds, whether in television or literary fiction, to instill many other retellings of the same kind. Rather than becoming a complicated art form, these popular works of art remained dynamic, appealing to a diverse audience across the globe. They emerge from fundamental issues and intellectual processes, leading the audience down the road they need to pursue. These stories let individuals reflect on their own lives and current events through the narrative style and characterization and increase the portrayal of the audience's desires, dreams, oppressions, and anxieties. They also explore for methods to break down real or imagined obstructions, and they frequently correspond to real-life scenarios.

Epical texts are rigorously examined here to fully comprehend their cultural significance so as to present a wide range of dynamic and contrasting

views that circle around the characters. They are portrayed in significant lights for this mythical fictions' modern ways of expression has shown to be a successful method for both connecting to one's cultural past and asserting one's current cultural and sociopolitical identity. These mythical re-presentations define and explain the spiritual potential of people and civilizations. Mythical revisioning investigates common archetypes and elaborates upon mind patterns to bring out pairs of opposites such as good and bad, virtue and vice in the plotline of the stories explored.

Indeed, the notion of truth in mythical remodeling is argued and discussed in a variety of situations. As many human actions are dependent on this truth, its existence as a concept is accepted rather than debated. Since revisioning is based on the reality of social systems and processes, the truth here is influenced by social experience. So each mythological fiction is real in its own way and is constructed on the basis of the values and standards established through social processes. What's more noteworthy is that the way the stories are told, right from the beginning to the end. The readers' and viewers' perspectives on Gods have shifted since the form of narration was altered from universal to individual. The human side of Gods was revealed as they got humanized. Hence these characters have all the human emotions for they feel, they fight, they empathize, they suffer, and their acts aren't motivated by anything higher.

Each narrative is unique in its interpretations and their contents are a combination of myth, history and fantasy. Besides, these popular mythological literary and television narratives that carry socio-political and spiritual

apprehensions facilitated the gods, goddesses as well as legends to live and act in favor of the expectations and fantasies of the common mass. As the mythical figures are humanized by attributing the same vulnerabilities of the ordinary people the gods approach the human kind from their spiritual worlds by breaking numerous cultural frontiers. Thus, the once sacred mythical figures are made accessible to the public as one of them. Many of these characters and their positions perturb the readers to the point where they begin to question every accepted norm. Furthermore, some of these characters are based on mythological characters, while others are wholly new creations of the authors.

Retelling is, in fact, the coalescence of different individual perceptions irrespective of any external biases. As it inculcates all possible behavioral intentions of mythology, retelling assumes different forms. These different forms have by now made such practices a novel way of understanding as it bases its platform on the existing culture and living. Hence every mythical reworking incorporates and addresses the issues of each particular group of people it belongs to. Usually the gods, goddesses, legends, heroes and the common people constitute the characters for retelling. Their life and history serve as the background for the portrayal of a socio cultural critique of the contemporary society. This very nature has paved the way for the multifacetedness of retellings that humanized gods. These mythologists are on their surer platform regarding how to retell mythology as literary and television narratives in a manner the popular haven't even thought of.

It is perceived that these subverted classics reinterpret the gaps in the epic texts. A compelling rewrite of a text that upholds patriarchal norms would be a significant achievement, but it could also inflict significant abrasion to an established story. Retellings from the perspective of disadvantaged, neglected, and muted characters provide a fresh and different take on the story. As a result, it is also noticed that while retelling a narrative, certain criteria must be kept in mind, as it requires simplicity of idea and presentation.

The significance of retellings is that they make the popular realize that the epics are as relevant today as they were in previous eras. The audience sees the connection between the epic's ideas and their own lives when the authors retell it. Ancient and modern mythic storytellers have generally considered that reality is too complicated to be grasped by any single way of investigation. As a result, they have depended primarily on storytelling to convey that intricacy. Stories about mythical figures were more real to them than reports of observable facts in many ways. They also revealed hidden linkages between mythological realities and everyday lives, places, things, and events that each person encounters.

The purpose behind mythological retelling is to make the people identify themselves beyond the boundaries. The power of these narratives arrives from their aptness to keep their potentials alive and to propagate ideologies by means of its stories. Mythology is different for different people because they adapt mythology into their lives differently. They practice it in their own way for they have got different understandings of the same mythology. This very fact is employed in retellings and the authors accomplish it innovatively in

their works. Thus, the notion of mythical retelling has started recognizing itself as a discipline having a unique frame work.

These aforementioned multiplicities in mythical revisioning are suggestive of the limitations of this practice. However, considering how daily life stories develop and the reflections they elicit, it is clear that reality is mirrored in a variety of viewpoints by nature. Even everyday life occurrences experienced by a large number of individuals generate several accounts, none of which are identical, and which occasionally disagree on key details. Mythical fictions provide alternative explanations to certain established conventions instead of promoting for erosion of faith. Such compositions frequently adhere to logic and serve as a representation for contemporary social behaviors. They modernize myths rather than religions, and are open to any change and addition. Almost all mythological writings are interpretive in nature, and each interpretation opens up the possibility of inconsistencies. These inconsistencies were then developed into its reconstructions. The reconstructed ones are subjected to new interpretations, and this diversity is unlikely to stray from the subjective truth. Though there are differences in the range of interpretations, the purpose remains the same.

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Chapter VII

Recommendations

Mythology generally relates to something very large-scale and expansive, frequently spanning a range over centuries. They provide perennial and fundamental concepts as well as historical and geographical context. Their retellings gained popularity because they let people realise how relevant the epics are to modern times as well as older ones. Hence, the question of originality needs to be developed and examined for these intricate historical narratives are linked to the present. The coexistence of the realm of dualities and counter culture is therefore essential to the reach of mythological retelling.

As part of mythical modernisation, the manner in which anthropocentrism and deification overlap is never addressed when authors attribute human sensibilities to the gods. The fast growing trends in mythical fictionalization through literary or television narratives and wide array of imaginary characters it offers make provisions for a research on the foundation of apotheosis and the issue of the distortion of centuries-old beliefs. As these tellings make the spectators get into the world of approachable gods and characters, the narratives' development based on the specificity of spectators and genre is a budding research area. Besides, the narratives that fall into television studies and reception analysis can be dissected to examine how they emphasised the significance of the context of audience consumption.

The ways in which each construct is systematised as a result of mediatization processes can also be explored for television narratives began to foster and spread particular media dispositions in cultural practises. Due to the fact that myths do not often convey the same story, those mythological resurgences, which result in transformations and hybrid forms within the social, political, historical and cultural spheres, also demand a de-compartmentalization when examining the nature of the epic narratives chosen.