Women Reimagined: A Narratological Analysis of Selected Indian Mythic Fiction

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

SHRUTI CHAKRABORTY

2017PHXF0105H

Under the Supervision of

Prof. M.G. Prasuna

BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE, PILANI
2024

BIRLA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE, PILANI

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **Women Reimagined: A Narratological Analysis of Selected Indian Mythic Fiction** submitted by **Shruti Chakraborty** ID No **2017PHXF0105H** for award of Ph.D. of the Institute embodies original work done by her under my supervision.

Signature of the Supervisor:

Name in capital letters: M.G. PRASUNA

Designation: Professor

Date: 12.06.2024

Acknowledgements

With the blessings of my Holy Mother, Adya Maa, I embarked on this journey back in 2017. Her spiritual support has been a strength for me throughout. I would like to thank all the people who have helped and guided me in my research journey. First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Prof. M. G. Prasuna for her guidance and constant support. I am particularly thankful to her for boosting my morale during my rough patches.

I would like to express my gratitude to my Doctoral Advisory Committee members – Prof. Shilpaa Anand (HoD), and Prof. Maya Vinai for their constant engagement with my work and their constructive feedback on my research.

I am thankful to Prof. Lavanya Suresh, the Departmental Research Committee Convenor, for her support.

A very special appreciation goes to Dr. Pranesh Bhargava and Prof. Santosh Mahapatra for their support and encouragement. I would like to thank Prof. T. Vijay Kumar for his invaluable suggestions.

Saritha Sasidharan, my little sister, has been there with me throughout my journey. I cannot thank her enough. My dearest friends, Revathy Hemachandran, Jaya Sarkar, Krithika Nambiar, Lakshmi Jahnavi, Shabin Ahmed, Anwesha Mohanty, Kopal Khare, Amrit Amlan have helped me time and again. My heartfelt thanks to them.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the faculty, staff, and fellow scholars of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

I thank my dearies Tina and Anusua for being there.

No words of gratitude are enough for my family. I thank my parents, Mita Chakraborti and Chanchal Chakraborti for their constant motivation. This journey would not have been the same

without the support of my dearest Sirisha. Last but not at all the least, I would like to acknowledge the indispensable support of my husband, Debjit and my son Dibyojyoti. They are my two pillars of strength. Without them this endeavour would not have been possible.

Abstract

The present research examines selected contemporary mythic narratives which offer interpretations of the Indian epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat. The primary texts selected for this study represent less explored and even unnoticed characters in the dominant readings and representations of the epics. This research aims to critically examine how the chosen epic characters are reimagined by contemporary Indian authors in the selected texts. There are nine primary texts chosen for the study, that focus on six female epic characters. The primary texts and the respective authors are – *Sita's Sister*, *Lanka's Princess*, and *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, by Kavita Kane, "Shanta", "Manthara", and "Meenakshi" by Anand Neelakantan. *The One Who Swam with the Fishes*, and *The One Who Had Two Lives* by Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan. And "Priestess" from *The Rise of Hastinapur* by Sharath Komarraju. The characters chosen for the study are – Urmila, Shanta, Surpanakha, Manthara from Ramayan; and Satyavati, and Amba from Mahabharat.

The primary premise of the research is to understand the narrative significance of the selected characters in the dominant and popular representations of Ramayan and Mahabharat, and then to locate their narrative position in the selected texts. Some of these characters have narrative significance, yet they remain less explored in popular representations. Characters like Urmila, Satyavati, and Amba – they play a significant role in the respective epic, but their representation, across literature, is limited. Again, characters like Surpanakha and Manthara have been dominantly identified as evil characters and have been assigned a relegated position in their popular representations. Shanta's character is also similarly unexplored in popular representations of Ramayan. However, from a narrative point of view of the epic stories, these characters have an independent role to play. A study of the selected texts will look into this aspect.

The theoretical framework adopted for this research is based on narratology. Narratology, in its classical phase, concentrated on the formal structure of a narrative and analysed its various aspects like – plot, point of view, character etc. In the postclassical phase, narratology has emerged with varied areas of interest. The postclassical phase is more inclusive of ideas than that of the preceding classical phase. The narratological components identified to understand the primary texts and the characters are – story and plot, point of view, character, temporality, and spatiality. The theorists whose works have been included to analyse the texts are – Tzvetan Todorov, Gerard Genette, A.J. Greimas, Seymour Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Wolf Schmid, Mieke Bal, and David Herman. Apart from the Western school of thought, this research also focuses on certain aspects of Indian narratology, as theorized by K. Ayyappa Paniker.

This study seeks to critically examine the selected texts applying the narratological components to understand how the interpretations of the epic characters offer a novel perspective towards the understanding of the two Indian epics. The methodology adopted for this research includes a close reading and textual analysis of the primary texts. It also examines these texts through the lens of narratology. Further, it identifies various elements of convergence and divergences in the given texts.

Keywords: reimagination, interpretation, mythic narrative, narratology, epic

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

Storytelling is one of the most ancient cultural traditions of India. It is one of the key cultural practices which involves both popular and scholarly dimensions. Children grow up listening to stories, and the practice of storytelling has remained active in every age. Stories have been told through different media, the contents and the perspectives have altered from one age to the other, but the act itself has never lost its charm. The act of storytelling instructs, educates, as well as entertains. Since the Vedic times, knowledge dissemination has happened through storytelling. The epics, the puranas, mythology, legends, and folktales, together form the rich narrative tradition of India. In the present digital era, there are animated representations, comics, audiobooks, graphic narratives, and multiple diverse media of storytelling that attribute further diversity to the act of storytelling.

The two Indian epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat are the richest sources of stories in this country. The key features of both the epics are their orality and plurality. Orality is inherent in the Indian concept of *sahitya*. The act of orality attributes the quality of plurality to a narrative. Since the stories travel across generations, people keep altering and interpreting the stories according to their socio-cultural, religious, and political orientations. These acts of addition, alteration, interpolation, and interpretation have enriched the tradition of epic narratives in India. The scope of these two epics has not remained restricted to the genre of epic narrative alone, rather, these epics happen to be living traditions in India. In "Repetition in the Mahabharata", A.K. Ramanujan states, "The Mahabharata provides materials and allusions to every artistic genre – from plays to proverbs, from folk performances to movies and TV"

(Ramanujan 161). His thoughts on Ramayan are presented in his essay, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation". He states, "The number of Ramayanas and the range of their influence in South and Southeast Asia over the past twenty-five hundred years or more are astonishing" (Ramanujan 24). Ramayan and Mahabharat are key cultural components that have influenced the social and cultural milieu of India, although not in a uniform way. Different authors from different regions of the country have approached the epics and interpreted those, based on their individual perception and perspectives. Each of these tellings is culture-specific and their social acceptance has also been different according to the cultural orientation of the respective society. The present research focuses on selected Indian English mythic fiction written in the past one decade. A brief account of the tradition of mythic writing in India will further elucidate the concept of mythic interpretations and their literary significance.

Myth is intangible yet omnipresent and it is impossible to arrive at a concrete, comprehensible definition of myth. People across the globe have imbibed different myths according to the nature of their respective societies, cultures, religions and so on. Myths reflect certain perspectives of a society which are embedded in its history and socio-cultural practices. Additionally, myth has a psychological existence, and is deeply rooted in a society offering it an experience of shared allusions. Another significant feature of myth is that it gets culturally transmitted across ages and this process of transmission is manifested through literature. The human mind has been impacted by myth in a variety of ways, and these effects are multifaceted and multilayered in nature. Myth is an integral aspect of human life because of awe-inspiring and timeless characteristics. In India the concept of epic is intertwined with mythology. Indian mythology has impacted the Indian culture and Indian literature from multiple dimensions. In India, the vast array of fictional writings and cultural discourses have found their basis in the stories of Ramayan and Mahabharat, and their numerous tellings. An analysis on Indian mythic

fiction would be incomplete without an understanding of these narratives which can be identified as dominant tellings of both the epics that have been written across centuries. However, apart from these dominant tellings, there is also a vast range of texts that are part of the living tradition of interpreting the epics in India, that deviate from the dominant readings of the epics.

Written in Sanskrit by Valmiki, the most widely read tale of Ramayan, is believed to have originated between fourth and fifth century BC. It was written as a verse and is known as *Valmiki Ramayana*, the most dominant telling of Ramayan in India. In the context of the oral literary tradition in India, it is commonly believed that this verse poem, whose authorship is attributed to Valmiki, was already existent in the oral form. Eventually it was compiled and edited by Valmiki. *Valmiki Ramayana* has inspired multitudes of representations and translations of the Ramayan narrative across ages. Hence, Valmiki, is reverentially attributed the status of *Adikavi*, i.e. the earliest poet, of Ramayan. One of the Jaina tellings of Ramayan called *Paumachariya* was composed in the fourth century AD. This text was written in Prakrit by Vimalsuri. This text is considered as the first interlingual translation between Sanskrit and Prakrit. The characterization of Ravan in this text displays sympathy towards his character. Ravan is not represented stereotypically as a negative character. Moreso, both Ram and Ravan have been identified as Jaina *salakapurushas* in this text.

Kamban's *Iramavataram*, is the most revered rendition of Ramayan in Tamil. This text was composed in the twelfth century AD. *Iramavataram* cannot be considered as a translation of *Valmiki Ramayana*. It was inspired by *Valmiki Ramayana*, yet it is an independent creation with a culture specific perspective. Kamban approached Surpanakha and Ravan's characters with sympathy. However, in his portrayal, Ram's character rises above the image of 'an ideal man' and attains the status of divinity. Kamban's interpretation of Valmiki's Ramayan displays the influence of Bhakti philosophy. Nagachandra composed *Ramachandra Charitrapurana* in

Kannada in the twelfth century AD. This is another noteworthy Jaina telling of Ramayan. In depicting Ravan's character, Nagachandra exhibits a radical deviation from Valmiki's approach towards the portrayal of Ravan. Nagachandra subverts the demonic image that is commonly associated with Ravan's character and transforms him into a tragic hero.

The major Ramayan telling of fourteenth century AD was composed in Bangla by Krittivas Ojha. This verse poem is known as *Krittivasi Ramayan*. *Krittivasi Ramayan* is commonly considered as a major translation of Valmiki's Ramayan in Bangla. However, this text is a culture specific representation of the socio-cultural milieu of fourteenth century Bengal. Two significant Ramayan tellings were composed in fifteenth century AD. *Bichitra Ramayan* written in Odia by Sarala Das in one. The other is *Adhyatmaramayanam Killipattu*, Ezhuthachchan's Malayalam rendition of Ramayan. In Malayalam, the word 'killipattu' means 'bird's song'. A parrot narrates the Ramayan tale in this text. *Adhyatmaramayanam Killipattu* largely drew inspiration from *Adhyatma Ramayan* written in the thirteenth century AD. There is a notable narrative component in both these texts that deviates significantly from Valmiki's Ramayan. The idea of a shadow Sita or '*maya* Sita' occurs in both the narratives. Just before being kidnapped by Ravan, the original Sita vanishes only to reappear during the *Agni pariksha* (the trial by fire). Meanwhile, the shadow Sita appears as the original one. The identical concept of '*maya* Sita' is also included by Tulsidas in his *Ramcharitmanas*. This text was composed in the sixteenth century AD in Awadhi-Hindi dialect.

Similar to Ramayan, Mahabharat too has a long narrative history. The Vyasa Mahabharat is believed to be the oldest of all the narratives that are available. This verse text is a major source of inspiration for countless other tellings in the Indian literary tradition. In tenth century AD, Pampa composed *Vikramarjun Vijaya* in Kannada which is a Jaina interpretation of Mahabharat. *Andhra Mahabharatam* was composed in Telugu, between eleventh and

thirteenth century AD by Nannaya, Thikkana, and Yerrapragada who are together popularly known as *Kavitrayam* (Trinity of Poets). This telling is popularly considered as a translation of Mahabharat, although it is not exactly so. It is not a mere translation of the Sanskrit Vyasa narrative. Rather, it is an independent narration in Telugu literary style, keeping the essence of the Sanskrit Mahabharat in mind. Sarala Das composed Mahabharat in Odia in the fifteenth century AD which is popularly known as *Sarala Mahabharata*. This work is considered to be his magnum opus. This telling of Mahabharat is quite deviant from the Sanskrit text, especially, in the characterisation of Duryodhana and Shakuni. The poet has sympathised with both the characters and they die not in ignominy, but in glory. In the same century (15th century AD), Ezhuthachchan composed *Mahabharatam Kilipattu* in Malayalam. Like Ezhuthachchyan's Ramayann , the telling of Mahabharat too is unique in its structure. The narration of this composition is in the form of a bird's song and the primary narrator is a parrot which reflects a specific cultural identity of the composition as well as the poet.

Apart from the dominant tellings, there are texts written across centuries, that deviate from the dominant perceptions and perspectives, especially in the choice of their protagonist. Urubhangam by Bhasa was composed between the 3rd-2nd century BC. Duryadhan is the protagonist of this text. During the same time, he also composed Karnabharam, in which Karna is the key character. In 16th century AD, Chandrabati, a Bengali female poet from rural Bengal, wrote *Chandrabati Ramayana*. This verse narrative depicts Sita's tale. Molla Ramayana, written in 16th century in Telugu by Atukuri Molla also exhibits a similar approach. Sita is the protagonist of that verse telling. Michael Madhusudan Dutta wrote *Meghnad Badh Kavya* in Bengali in the 19th century. Ravan's son, Meghnad is the protagonist of this text. Later, in the 20th century, texts like *Mrityunjay* by Shivaji Sawant and *Yagnaseni* by Pratibha Ray have gained critical attention. *Mrityunjay* is written in Marathi, Karna is the key character of the text. Draupadi is the protagonist of *Yagnaseni*, written in Odiya. These texts display a shift of

focus, from the characters who are dominantly represented, towards female epic characters, less explored characters, and characters who are known as antagonists of the epic stories. These texts deviate from the dominant understanding of the epic stories. The authors of these texts find gaps in the representations of the traditional epic narratives and address those gaps. These texts demonstrate unconventional interpretations of the epics, novel perspectives, and transgressive ideas. In this research, these texts are identified as the 'literary antecedents' to the selected primary texts because the texts selected for this study also exhibit similar narrative features.

Although these tellings of Ramayan and Mahabharat, both the dominant and alternative narratives, are commonly considered to be translations of the dominant Sanskrit composition of the epics, the term 'translation' is a misnomer if applied to these texts. Written in different Indian languages, each of these texts is individual in content and representation. Therefore, these texts should be evaluated as independent tellings which contribute to the vast tradition of mythic narratives in India. The multitude of interpretations of the epics are living testimony of the features of fluidity and flexibility that is inherent in Indian narrative tradition. They paved way for countless authors across generations to interpret the Indian epics in different ways, from different perspectives; and altogether, it has enriched the literary and cultural tradition of India.

Two key aspects about the reading of the Ramayan in India and throughout the Asian subcontinent are brought forth in Ramanujan's essay, "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation". The arguments that Ramanujan presented in his essay becomes relevant to understand the tradition of mythic narratives in India. In the essay, Ramanujan's first argument is that there has long been a disagreement among scholars about whether or not the Ramayan can be regarded as 'one' tale. Ramanujan postulates that the

idea about the epic being a singular, 'authoritative' creation can be refuted because of its orality and the manner in which it has been incorporated into a variety of literary and artistic creations throughout the Indian subcontinent. Ramanujan, further suggests that each and every Ramayan, whether it is the Kamban's *Iramavataram* or the Jaina *Paumachariya* penned by Vimalasuri, are unique stories because these narratives have their own cultural, historical, and social roots. Therefore, none of the tellings may take precedence over the others. One of the fundamental characteristics of the two epics lies in their tenets of plurality and diversity, which allows for a wide range of possible interpretations and adaptations. The scope of this research involves a detailed examination of selected contemporary Indian English mythic narratives. The tapestry of Indian mythic fiction writing demonstrates the inclination of many writers to question the prevalent perceptions of specific epic characters and episodes. Across ages, authors and other creative minds have approached and adapted the epics according to their perception and ideological orientation. Ramayan and Mahabharat have frequently been reexplored to give them new interpretations that serve the author's objectives. Ramanujan further states that he prefers the word 'tellings' over 'versions' to refer to the different interpretations of Ramayan. Although he comments that Valmiki's text is the earliest and 'most prestigious' in the history of epic narratives in India, yet it cannot be considered as an original, Ur-text (Ramanujan 24-25).

Irawati Karve, in her seminal research and analysis on Mahabharata titled *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch*, offers a similar insight on the features of inclusivity and diversity of Mahabharat. In this work, Karve offers a critical evaluation of the epic's characters in addition to offering a logical theory for the epic's genesis. She approaches the epic with a pragmatic realism. She states, "The Mahabharata is a record of human beings with human weaknesses" (Karve 74). In her research, Karve examines the phases of the Mahabharat's evolution and suggests that, initially it was a lot more straightforward narrative in verse form about a

fratricidal battle and the eventual victory of a one king. It was referred to as *Jaya* in that form. Karve claims that the epic comprises over 200,000 unique verse lines and is the longest epic in th

e world mainly because of numerous later interpolations. She suggests that the best of these interpolations is the *Bhagavad Gita*. According to Karve, the epic was originally written by the *sauta* (charioteer) bards and was a part of the secular branch of Sanskrit literature known as *Sauta* literature, which dates back to around 1000 B.C. "This literature embodied the secular, political tradition of Sanskrit literature" (Karve 5). Karve further suggests that Krishna Dwaipayan, popularly known as Vyasa, is not the author of Mahabharat, but the compiler of the epic, "The word 'Vyasa' is a title which means 'arranger'… If we take into consideration this tradition, then, perhaps, Vyasa was not the original composer of the story but the man who might have taken it as told by the Suta bards and arranged it" (Karve 9).

The present research seeks to examine nine contemporary Indian mythic narratives, each one focussing on a lesser explored character from Ramayan or Mahabharat. The scope of the present research involves a close study of selected mythic texts published during the past one decade. The tradition of writing Indian mythic fiction includes authors who chose to challenge the popular notion pertaining to certain characters and episodes of the epics. An author can choose to approach myths from multiple and different perspectives. In a narrative, myths are often adapted and interpreted to assign new meanings, to suit the author's needs and to fulfil their purpose. The present study seeks to explore how different episodes of the two Indian epics are interpreted and how the selected epic characters are reimaged in the selected primary texts. In this context, words like – reimagination, re-exploration, reimaging, etc. are frequently used in this study. The usage refers to the significance of the prefix – 're', which refers to 'again'. The research seeks to understand how the stories that are explored again and

again across ages, can generate new meanings when they are approached from a different perspective.

The primary texts chosen for the study are:

Sita's Sister by Kavita Kane (2014)

"Priestess" from *The Rise of Hastinapur* by Sarath Komarraju (2015)

The Fisher Queen's Dynasty by Kavita Kane (2017)

Lanka's Princess by Kavita Kane (2017)

The One Who Swam with the Fishes by Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan (2017)

The One Who Had Two Lives by Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan (2018)

"Manthara" by Anand Neelakantan (2021)

"Shanta" by Anand Neelakantan (2021)

"Meenakshi" by Anand Neelakantan (2021)

(The texts have been mentioned according to the year of publication.)

The selected texts portray six female characters, four from Ramayan and two from Mahabharat. The selected female characters from Ramayan are Urmila, Surpanakha, Shanta, and Manthara. In *Sita's Sister*, Kavita Kane foregrounds Urmila's character and narrates the tale of Ramayan from her perspective. The character of Surpanakha is the protagonist of both Kane's *Lanka's Princess*, and Anand Neelakantan's Meenakshi". The character of Shanta figures in another text written by Neelakantan, "Shanta". In "Manthara", Neelakantan foregrounds Manthara's story keeping in background her age-old representation that dominates

the popular perception of her character. The characters selected from Mahabharat are Satyavati, and Amba. Satyavati appears as the key character in Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, and Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan's *The One Who Swam with The Fishes*. Amba appears as the protagonist in both, Madhavan's *The One Who Had Two Lives*, and Sharath Komarraju's novel, *The Rise of Hastinapur*. All of these characters have a major role to play in the turn of events in the epics. However, they have often gone unnoticed, and less explored in the popular adaptations, representations, and tellings of the epics.

The selected authors have attempted to narrate some parts of Ramayan and Mahabharat from the perspectives of the above-mentioned characters. This research analyses each text using the theoretical framework of narratology. The narratological aspects that will be employed to analyse the texts are - story and plot, point of view, character, temporality and spatiality.

1.2 Selection of the primary texts

This study aims at analysing interpretations and representations of a few characters from Ramayan and Mahabharat that have remained marginalised in the popular readings of the epics. Hence, the narrative component, 'character' emerges as fundamental to the understanding of this research. Although each of the selected characters has a significant role in the narrative of the respective epic, with the progression of time, they have often gone unnoticed, unheard or have been identified as negative characters. The rationale behind selecting these texts is that they focus on the less explored characters that have had an inadequate narrative presence in dominant representations of Ramayan and Mahabharat, in spite of their significant narrative roles in the principal storyline of the respective epic.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted for the analysis of the primary texts is narratology. Narratology, as a domain of literary theory, emerged from structuralism. That early phase of narratology in the 1960s is now classified as classical narratology, while the developments that have been taking place since 1980s, are identified as the phase of postclassical narratology. Narratology is a study of narrative structure. This literary theory is aimed at examining the commonalities and divergences that narratives contain. It investigates a universal narrative pattern that operates across texts while considering the fact that the 'same' narrative can be approached and interpreted in diverse forms through different media. Further, this theoretical approach also examines how different narrative structures and narrative components in a text, contribute to the meaning making of that text. This idea is the primary basis for choosing narratology as the theoretical framework for the present research. This research seeks to analyse selected interpretations of the Indian epics on the basis of a set of narratological techniques. An understanding of the functions of these techniques in the selected texts offer an insight into how the chosen epic characters are reimagined in these texts. Further, since the research includes multiple texts written with a similar approach, the other core premise of narratology, i.e., finding a pattern of representation, becomes instrumental as a potent theoretical framework.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine how the characters are reexplored and reimagined in the selected primary texts.
2. To analyse how the interpretations of the selected characters contribute to a different understanding of the significance of their roles in the dominant tellings.

3. To explore if there are any resemblances among the authors' individual approach to the selected characters.
4. To carry out a comparative study to analyse how the narratological components of plot and point of view influence the character representations.
5. To assess whether the chosen primary texts contribute to a novel reading of the epics deviating from the dominant perceptions.

1.5 The scope and limitations of the research

The principal storylines of these epics are innately present in the collective Indian mind and the chief characters of these epics are well known. This study is concerned with analysing how the popular, commonly perceived stories are approached by the respective authors from the perspective of epic characters that are often ignored and unnoticed. The scope of this research includes some characters that are overshadowed by the narrative presence of key characters of Ramayan and Mahabharat. Hence, characters like – Urmila, Shanta, Surpanakha, Manthara, Satyavati, and Amba, have been selected for the study. Further, the research does not refer to any one particular telling of the epics. The premise of the research is the popular and dominant perception of the characters that is deep-rooted in the Indian context. The mythic narratives selected for the research re-view these dominant perceptions, reimagine the characters and represent a novel perspective. The research examines how the reimagination takes place in the respective texts and how that contributes to a different understanding of the epics in the context of these characters.

Limitations of the research

- From the plethora of less explored epic characters, this research has narrowed down to only six female characters. The basis of the selection of these characters lies in the

disparity between their narrative roles in the epics and the limited narrative scope that they have in the popular representations.

- The primary texts chosen for this study have been published in the past one decade. The research does not include mythic fiction written earlier.
- All the primary texts are written in English. The study does not include texts in translation or texts written in any Indian language.

1.6 Research Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study is qualitative and analytical in nature. The preliminary task, in the research, was to select the primary texts. This was followed by a close reading of the selected texts. Further, the narrative elements like, story/plot, point of view, character, temporality, and spatiality were finalized. The primary texts have been critically studied in the context of the narrative elements. To support the critical analysis of the primary texts, a close analytical reading of the secondary sources has been done. The secondary sources here refer to the books and essays selected from the vast domain of narratology which is discussed in detail in the chapter on literature review. The literature review also consists of texts on Indian narratology. Different aspects of Indian narratology have been studied to understand the fundamental literary tenets of Ramayan and Mahabharat. Apart from the secondary sources on narratology, a close reading of the two epics has been done to have a comprehensive idea about the epics, and for a better understanding of the primary texts. For this purpose, the English translations done by Bibek Debroy entitled *The Critical Edition of Valmiki Ramayana* and *The Critical Edition of Mahabharata* have been studied.

Apart from the theoretical analysis, a comparative study has also been done as part of the research. The comparative study aims to identify the similarities and differences that exist among the primary texts. The research includes texts written by two different authors on the

same character. Hence, it becomes important to examine from a comparative perspective, how two contemporary authors approach the same character. The concluding chapter presents the arguments and the final analysis. The research outcome has been discussed in detail. Also, further scope of research is presented.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

To conclude the introductory chapter, here is a brief overview of the flow of work that is to follow. The following chapter (Chapter 2) consists of the Literature Review. In Chapter 3 the primary texts and the respective protagonists will be analysed on the basis of the selected narrative techniques. The narratological techniques analysed in this chapter are – story and plot, point of view, temporality, and spatiality. In Chapter 4, analysis of reimagination of the protagonists are done based on the narratological component 'character'. In Chapter 5, the comprehensive comparative study will be done. Chapter 6 will be the conclusion of the thesis. This chapter includes the findings, discussion, specific contributions of the thesis and future scope of work.

Difference in names of characters

Since the study includes texts written by multiple authors, there exists a difference in the spellings of the characters. Kane refers to Bhishma as Bhism and Madhavan refers to him as Bheeshma. Similarly, both Kane and Neelakantan refer to Surpanakha as Meenakshi. Hence, a difference in spellings of their names can be noticed in course of analysis according to the spellings used by a respective author.

Chapter 2

Narratology and its Departures

The literature review for the present research is divided into two parts. The first part aims at an understanding of the core concepts of narratology, including its classical and postclassical phases. The second part explores the theory of Indian narratology, to develop a better understanding of the literary tenets of the epics. The title of this chapter refers to the works on narratology and the way the theory has evolved over years.

2.1 Concepts on the definitions of 'narrative'

Before initiating the discussion on narratology, a brief understanding of what 'narrative' is, becomes essential. The term 'narrative' generally refers to literary genres like novel, novella, short story etc. However, it is the act to *narrate* that lies at the core of the concept of 'narrative', and the literary genre is a medium to execute that act. Narrative exists at every level of human society. Whenever somebody 'tells' about something, it has the potential to be considered as a narrative. "A newsreader on the radio, a teacher at school, a school friend in the playground, a fellow passenger on a train, a newsagent, one's partner over the evening meal, a television reporter, a newspaper columnist or the narrator in the novel that we enjoy reading before going to bed" (Fludernik 1), all or any of these can be examined as a narrative which makes humans narrators of their own stories. The act of narrating, therefore, pervades in almost every sphere of human society. In the mid-twentieth century, the act of narrating or storytelling became a major point of interest. This eventually resulted in the development of the narrative theory known as narratology. The theory of narratology emerged as a formal attempt to isolate and examine a story as a story. It aimed at locating what narratives

have in common and those commonalities are examined by the application of some narrative-specific rules.

The act of storytelling has been an integral part of human society since time immemorial. Along with the rigorous, formal, structuralist approach geared towards the study of narratives, the act of storytelling itself appears as a major component of narratology. Narratology probes into the act of storytelling to identify the structures underlying any narrative, and also examines the narrative techniques that contribute to the development of the structure of a narrative. In "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", Barthes says,

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories. Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Capraccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative, all classes, all human groups have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different or even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (Barthes and Duisit 237).

The idea that Barthes presents here captures the all-pervasive nature of 'narrative'. Barthes has been one of the most prominent structuralist theorists whose contribution to the field of

narratology is considered to be invaluable. His idea of narratives hints at a much-liberal and inclusive idea of narratology, something which does not tend to remain limited to any particular discipline. Rather, it applies to a varied kind of human creativity. It broadens the horizon for narrative theory to exercise in an interdisciplinary manner.

'Narrative' exists in almost every sphere of human life. Yet, reaching at a singular, comprehensive definition of it becomes an immeasurably difficult task. Narratologists have been contributing towards defining 'narrative' to make the concept comprehensible. However, none of them has claimed that their ideas have formulated a concrete definition of what a narrative is. Most of them suggest that the term 'narrative' is often used in a broader sense rather than in a precise, specific manner. The common factor that is present in almost every definition includes the idea of narration that encompasses the factors of events, actants, causality, and temporality (Herman and Vervaeck 57). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests in her essay, "Concepts of Narrative", that the available definitions of a narrative refer to its two features: (i) a narrative comprises of events governed by temporality, and (ii) the act of telling or narration or mediation all of which refer to the verbal transmission of fictional information in the realm of literature. However, Kenan herself points out the problem that lies in the second feature. The contemporary usage of the term 'narrative' does not remain restricted to literature alone; it also refers to music, opera, visual arts, film, drama, dance, and so on. Moreso, she concludes her essay by not proposing a definite 'conclusion' regarding the definition of a narrative, rather, she raises some relevant questions that would enable the readers to contemplate on the concept of the narrativity of a text.

Marie-Laure Ryan also demonstrates the problematic dichotomy, regarding the relation between events and representation, that is associated with the formulation of a definition of narrative in her essay, "Toward a definition of narrative". She examines different definitions

proposed by different narratologists like, Gerard Genette, Gerald Prince, H. Porter Abbott, Paul Ricoeur, Mieke Bal, Peter Brooks. These narratologists opine that a narrative should be about problem solving; it is about interpersonal relations and it should have a conflict; it is also a manifestation of human existence and experience. Ryan examines the fundamental premise of narratology and identifies three components which she considers as potential domains for reaching a conclusive definition of a narrative. These components are – discourse, story and their use. On the basis of these components, Ryan proposes four conditions of narrativity, of which three are semantic and one is formal and pragmatic in dimension. These dimensions are as follows – spatial dimension, temporal dimension, mental dimension, formal and pragmatic dimension. A study of these multiple dimensions suggests that Ryan focuses more on the factors that contribute to the narrativity of a text.

David Rudrum, in his essay "From Narrative Representation to Narrative Use: Towards the limits of Definition", pays attention to the relation between events and their representation which refers to the popular notion of a narrative. However, his focus remains on negating the idea of the relation between events and their representation as a definition of narrative (Rudrum 198). He opines that a recipe book or a manual also contains a representation of sequential events or processes which are not considered as narratives. He probes into different literary components in order to identify the pivotal factor that renders a text its narrativity. According to Rudrum, a narrative is neither the sequence of events nor the temporality of their representation, but the way a text is 'used' by the people of a specific linguistic or cultural community that decides the narrativity of a text. By the term 'used' he refers to the acts of consumption, reading, responding, and acting upon a text. He further focuses on the element of engagement and responsiveness that a reader has towards a text which is reflected in its 'use', which eventually contributes to adding narrativity to that particular text. Rudrum's

perception of a narrative edges on reader-response and reception theory, both of which have gained renewed attention in the domain of postclassical narratology.

The other major theorist of postclassical narratology, David Herman, approaches defining a narrative based on principles of cognitive narratology. The term 'postclassical narratology' first appeared in Herman's seminal essay, "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology". This essay is also significant in locating a postclassical definition of a narrative. Herman, in this essay, thoroughly examines different types of representations and presents a critical overview of how narrativity of a text can be determined. He emphasises more on how the events in a narrative unfold, which he refers to as the 'script' rather than the mere representation of the events. He further focuses on 'schema' which refers to the memory patterns of human beings on the basis of which they can perceive a given narrative. It is the pattern that is already stored in the human memory from previous experiences that enables them to make meaning of a given text. Herman demonstrates two distinctive narrative factors – 'narrativehood' and 'narrativity' and their interrelation in order to demonstrate his perception of the term 'narrative'. According to him, "*Narrativehood* can be conveniently paired with *narrativity* to suggest the contrast between, on the one hand, the minimal conditions for narrative sequences and, on the other, the factors that allow narrative sequences to be more or less readily processed as narratives" (Herman 1048). His analysis, therefore, centres around the connectivity among linguistic forms of a text, a reader's world knowledge, and the narrative structure of a text.

Here, an attempt has been made to present a comprehensive review of the different definitions of 'narrative'. However, there is no single, conclusive definition since there have always been multiple perceptions, dimensions and orientations associated with the concept of narrative.

Narrative techniques

A comprehensive understanding of the concept of 'narrative' paves the path for the understanding of narratology. In the domain of narratology, narrative techniques play a major, significant role. "Narrative techniques are the devices of storytelling" (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 370). There is a cause-and-effect relationship that applies to the sequence of events narrated and forms the basis of any narrative. Narrative techniques contribute in delineating this cause-and-effect relationship. According to the theory of narratology, the first and major device that any narrative comprises of, is the distinction between the story (*fabula)* and the plot (*sjuzhet*) in which the relationship between cause and effect is manifested. The story is the **what** that a narrative consists of and the plot is **how** the story has been narrated. While the **what** comprises of the characters and events of a narrative, the **how** refers to the techniques of representing those. The other components of a narrative, outlined in narratology, are – character, temporality, spatiality, focalization and style. Again, different theorists have contributed to the development and application of these components which has resulted in a varied range of terminology.

2.2 History and progression of Narratology

Early twentieth century witnessed a major development in the realm of narrative research. Important contributions during that period were made by Käte Friedemann (1910), Percy Lubbock (*The Craft of Fiction*, 1921), E. M. Forster (*Aspects of the Novel*, 1927) and Henry James (in the prefaces to his novels collected in *The Art of the Novel*, 1934) (Fludernik 10). Around mid-twentieth century, a major breakthrough in narrative research was achieved by the German narrative theorists. A number of classic texts on narrative theory were available in English translation that became instrumental in the study of narratology. Eberhard Lämmert's 'Forms of Narrative' (1955), F. K. Stanzel's *Narrative Situations in the Novel*,

(1971), and Käte Hamburger's *The Logic of Literature* (1957/1993) are a few works that are still relevant in the domain of narratology.

The Russian Formalists' contribution to the study of narrative theory is considered to be another major advancement in the field of narratology. Formalists like Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Mikhail Bakhtin and the Prague School have offered deep insights into the analysis of narratives. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1930s) has been an impactful text in the understanding of speech and thought representations in narratives. Semiologist Jury Lotman and the Czech theorist Jan Mukarovsky paved way for the emergence of narratological structuralism. The phase of Russian narratology was followed by the era of classical narratology. This is the period when the formation of a narrative theory was taking place and the term 'narratology', i.e., the study of narratives was coined. Classical narratology emerged from French Structuralism, which includes the works of Claude Bremond, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette (Fludernik 10). These structuralist theorists drew their inspiration from the work of Russian Structuralist and folklorist, Vladimir Propp. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktales* was published in Russian in 1928. Later it was translated into English in 1958, which opened new possibilities of narrative research.

While, Propp paved the way for the development of classical narratology, Gerard Genette played the pivotal role in the further development of narrative theory. Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, is considered as one of the most significant contributions to the study of narrative theory in the twentieth century. In *Narrative Discourse*, he presents a distinction between the concepts of story and plot, and the act of narrating in order to analyse the discourse of the novel. The terms he used for this distinction are – *historie* (story), *recit* (plot), and *narrating* (the act of narration). Genette's theoretical framework

became an invaluable tool and a strong foundation for the advancement of subsequent research on narratology.

Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman and Susan Lanser are the theorists whose works were deeply impacted by Genette's theoretical framework. Narrative research in the United States underwent major changes with the advent of poststructuralism and became quite diverse in nature. As a result, major literary approaches like, psychoanalysis, feminism, discourse analysis etc. got merged into the field of narrative research. Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) was a major contribution to the development of narratology in which Booth attempted to revise and continue the narratological approaches of Henry James and Percy Lubbock. James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz are the present-day American narratologists whose theories centre around the rhetorical aspects of narrative. Apart from Gerald Prince, further models of narrative study have been developed by theorists like Thomas Pavel, Marie-Laure Ryan, David Herman (Fludernik 11) and so on. The recent trends in narrative study in America also explore theoretical models of postcolonialism and queer theory.

Some eminent present-day narratologists, from across the globe, who have been engaged in the development of narrative research are – Meir Sternberg, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Tamar Yacobi. The tradition of narratological research has continued ceaselessly in countries like Germany and France. Contemporary notable German narratologists are - Wolf Schmid, Manfred Jahn, Ansgar Nünning, Monika Fludernik and Werner Wolf. Similarly, in countries like Scandinavia, Spain, Belgium, and Netherlands narrative research remains a major discipline of study in humanities.

The concerns and scope of narrative research has also become quite divergent in the present time. Narrative research now tends to extend its scope to questioning and revising the significant elements of classical narratology, as well as to explore possibilities to apply

narratological framework to non-literary narratives. Recent trends in narratology include areas of cognitive narratology, transmedial and interdisciplinary narrative research. The contemporary mode of narrative research transcends the scope of structural analyses of narrative which was the key element of structuralist narratology. It tends to extend its purview to include issues of authorship, cognitive response of readers, publications, publicity and marketing of the texts, and so on. Since, the classical phase remained concentrated only on the scope of structural analysis of a narrative, the stages of production, publishing, and publicity have been largely ignored in classical narratology. In favour of literary criticism, these sociological aspects have been ignored. However, postclassical narratology aims at a re-conceptualization of the relationship between text and context, and literary and non-literary discourses.

2.3 Postclassical narratology – genesis and development

The term 'postclassical narratology' first appeared in David Herman's seminal essay, "Scripts, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology" which was published in 1997. However, it gained much academic attention only after the publication of Herman's *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* in 1999. Since then, it has been considered as the major umbrella term that refers to the varied and diverse developments in the field of narratological research. The key tenet of postclassical narratology is – taking classical narratology as its foundation, it is making a constant evolution towards diversification and plurality. This part of the thesis aims at presenting an overview of the nature, and the different features of postclassical narratology. It traces postclassical narratology's connection to classical narratology and examines the expansions that have been currently taking place both in the fields of theory and its application in narrative research. The present research also aims at understanding the contributions of selected theorists in postclassical narratology who made

major contributions to its conceptual understanding, like – David Herman, Jan Alber, Monika Fludernik, Roy Sommer, and Biwu Shang.

Postclassical narratology emerged not as a reaction to classical narratology. It did not aim to reject it either. Rather, it is an extension and an expansion of the classical phase and its ideas and practices. Postclassical narratology recognizes classical narratology as its foundation. Therefore, it can be assumed that classical narratology is considered as a precursor to its postclassical counterpart. The postclassical counterpart rethinks and recontextualizes its precursor. Although the postclassical narratologists have examined the primary premises of classical narratology and identified its limitations, still they have made extensive use of the core elements of classical narrative theory to render progression to the postclassical domain. According to Gerald Prince, "It (postclassical narratology) refers to an abundant and varied corpus: the traditional 'great works', of course, but also less canonical or more subversive texts, non-fictional and non-literary stories, 'natural' or spontaneous oral narratives" (Prince 117). Prince's comment refers to the prime features of postclassical narratology. Prince highlights the way postclassical narratology has approached diversification, and its urge to seek freedom from the structuralist orthodoxy regarding literary form and techniques of classical narratology.

The transition from the classical phase to the postclassical phase was neither radical nor revolutionary, rather it was marked by a steady evolution which is still continuing. Monika Fludernik and Jan Alber have even suggested, in *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*, that postclassical narratology has reached its second phase. The first phase took place in the first two decades of the present millennium. The transition from the classical phase to the postclassical phase is a manifestation of some prominent literary developments. By the end of 1980s, classical narratology was highly influenced by poststructuralism. It is reflected in Jonathan Culler's borrowing of Derrida's idea of deconstruction to reverse the relation between

story and discourse. The relation between story and discourse is a vital component of structuralist narratology. The concept of story and discourse is analogous to Saussure's idea of the signified and signifier respectively, in which, discourse is often understood as the plot. The assumption of classical narratology was that, the formation of plot or discourse depends on the story. Culler demonstrated the reverse. He opined that the story is generated by the discourse. Therefore, under the poststructuralist influence, the story-discourse distinction gets a new shape and adds a new dimension to its understanding within the narratological paradigm.

Peter Brooks too emphasizes plot over structuration. In *Reading for the Plot*, he opines that unfolding of events in a narrative is its core component, hence, the plot that demonstrates the unfolding of events is supposed to be of more importance than the structure of the narrative. Mieke Bal, again, in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* suggests that text-centredness cannot do complete justice to the core idea of narratology. She calls for a cultural contextualisation and interpretation of texts, an idea that certainly seeks to broaden the scope of narrative theory and research. These are a few literary developments that have contributed to the evolution of postclassical narratology from its classical predecessor, and by the end of the twentieth century, narratology almost ceased to refer to a singular, unified concept. Its classical paradigm was transformed to the postclassical paradigm that refers to a conglomeration of theories and diversification of approaches. Herman refers to this transition from the classical to the postclassical phase as 'metamorphosis'. In "Introduction" to *Narratologies*, he states, "Adapting a host of methodologies and perspectives – feminist, Bakhtinian, deconstructive, reader-response, psychoanalytic, historicist, rhetorical, film-theoretical, computational, discourse-analytic and (psycho)linguistic – narrative theory has undergone not a funeral and burial but rather a sustained, sometimes startling metamorphosis" (Herman 1).

Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, in the "Introduction" to *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses,* give a vivid account of the evolution, transition, developments and the distinction between the first and the second phase of postclassical narratology. Other than David Herman, Alber and Fludernik have taken into account the works of theorists like Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Gerald Prince, Seymour Chatman, Meir Sternberg, Susan Lanser, Thomas Pavel, Ansgar Nunning, and James Phelan to name a few (Alber and Fludernik 2). These theorists were the prominent figures in the development of the idea of postclassical narratology. While Susan Lanser has propagated the concept of feminist narratology, Rimmon-Kenan has focused on the 'geometric imaginary of narratology'. Seymour Chatman's focus has remained on analysing film narrative. These ideas, along with a varied range of modifications of narrative theory and application, render postclassical narratology its heterogenous nature which transcends the scope of its structuralist forerunner, the classical narratology, but by no means negates it.

The most important and significant contribution of Alber and Fludernik lies in the distinction of the first and second phase of postclassical narratology that they have suggested in their "Introduction". They posit that the first phase of the postclassical model is marked by 'multiplicities, interdisciplinaries and transmedialities', and that it is centrifugal in nature. However, they strongly suggest that this centrifugal model of varied thematic and medial approaches should take a centripetal turn in aligning with the core elements of the classical model. "By taking phase-one developments seriously, postclassical narratology will moreover subject its structuralist core to serve critical scrutiny, lopping, modifying, revising, or redesigning the foundations of the discipline" (Alber and Fludernik 5). That is the scope and premise of the second phase of postclassical narratology – a phase of both consolidation as well as diversification.

Roy Sommer elaborates on three very interesting abbreviations to trace the progression that has happened in the domain of narratology from its classical to its postclassical phase, in his essay, "The Merger of Classical and Postclassical Narratologies and the Consolidated Future of Narrative Theory". He too suggests a consolidation and synthesis of both the phases, which paves the way for contemporary as well as future development in the domain of narrative theory and research.

Biwu Shang follows the same line of thought. He observes that not only the essential quality of plurality but also the factor of complementarity that exists between the diverse approaches of the postclassical landscape make narratology a far broadened and refined area of literary interest. Shang strongly believes that the complementarity of diverse ideas is the future of narrative theory. In this essay, he elaborates on the different theoretical aspects of postclassical narratology, and suggests the usage of the term "postclassical narratologies" instead of the umbrella term, "postclassical narratology". Shang postulates that, "If postclassical narratologies burgeoned by these various critical trends remain in dialogue and embark upon the road of pluralism, the study of postclassical narratologies is bound to be more flourishing and promising in the future, with three virtues highlighted: 'vitality, justice, and understanding'" (Shang 142).

The emphasis towards 'plurality' in relation to understanding of a narrative put forth in postclassical narratology, is relevant for the present study. Further, this research also adopts the fundamental distinction between story and plot, to interpret the primary texts.

2.4 Indian Narratology

The concept of Indian narratology has majorly focused on identifying and analysing narrative techniques in verse and drama. A theorisation of the narrative techniques applied in prose; especially fictional prose has remained largely ignored. In the context of Indian narrative

tradition, it is highly paradoxical that although storytelling has been one of the most ancient cultural practices of this land, yet, a structured and organized theory on narratology has not been developed. K. Ayyappa Paniker has focused on this lacuna, and addressed this gap in his seminal text, *Indian Narratology*. In this text, he not only presents a thorough critical analysis of Indian narratology, but also theorizes the concept. Traditional Indian literature primarily comprised verse and drama. In India, both have a long history and occupy a significant place in the domain of literary creation. Paniker emphatically contends that this predominance of verse and drama has indirectly resulted in the absence of an extensive theorization of prose literature, especially, fictional narratives in India. "The basic texts on poetics in Sanskrit like *Natya Sastra* or *Dhanyaloka* pay more attention to poetry and drama, and have not directly said much about fictional narration as such" (Paniker 2). As a result, a theorization of critical analysis of fictional narratives has remained largely ignored. This research chooses the Western school of thought as the theoretical framework over Indian narratology as critical theory on prose literature in the domain of Indian narratology is significantly limited.

In this context, Paniker's book, *Indian Narratology* is considered to be an important contribution to the realm of Indian literary theory. In this text, Paniker strongly advocates for the development of a critical practice that would be used for analysing oral and written fictional texts. The act of storytelling and the practice of narration play a vital role in constructing the diverse cultural identity of India. He contends that the vast body of narratives written in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, Apabhramsa, Paisachi, Tamil, and other Indian languages spanning between the ancient and the modern period, deserve a keen attention. In his book, *Indian Narratology* he analyses fictional narratives that range from the Vedic literature to the folk tales. However, the formal and critical study of fictional prose narrative has hardly gained a strong ground. Paniker examines the extent of ancient Sanskrit narratology that concerns prose

narrative. However, he also mentions that these commentaries are inadequate in connection to the huge corpus of narratives that India has produced across ages and languages.

Paniker, in *Indian Narratology*, elucidates on ten major models of Indian fictional narratives. Paniker opines that categorization of narratives is a literary exercise and not a structured historical one. He presents an overview of different types of fictional texts, both oral and written, instead of a temporally chronological documentation. The ten different narrative categories and the corresponding models are -

Narrative	**Model**
The Vedic or Encrypted Narrative	*Rg* Veda Model
The Purana or Saga Narrative	*Bhagvata* Model
The Itihasa or Epic Narrative	*Ramayana/ Mahabharata* Model
The Srinkhala or Chain Narrative	*Kathasaritsagara* Model
The Anyapadesa or Allegorical Narrative	*Panchatantra* Model
The Mahakavya or Grand Narrative	*Raghuvamsa* Model
The Buddhist and Jain Narratives	*Jataka* Model
The Dravidian Narrative	*Cilappatikaram* Model

The Folk and Tribal Narratives	Multiple Model
The Misra or Miscellaneous Narratives	Miscellaneous Model

To elucidate on the Vedic or encrypted narratives, Paniker expounds on the literary scope of the Vedas. The Vedas are comprised mainly of lyrical hymns that are primarily devotional in nature. However, there also are Vedic hymns which reflect certain kinds of narrativity which are mostly encrypted in form. Paniker refers to these hymns as 'mini tales', since they are cryptic in nature. One of the key instances of such Vedic cryptic narratives is the story of Urvasi and Pururavas which Kalidasa transformed into a full-length play, *Vikramorvasiyam*. Explaining the narratives from the puranas or the saga narratives and the Bhagavata model, Paniker states, "The richest treasure house of Indian narratology is perhaps the *Puranas* and *Upapuranas* and the works emanating from *Puranas*" (Paniker 29). The Puranas contain infinite number of stories which are an unceasing source of narratives. Paniker cites the *Bhagavata* as the classic example of saga narratives in India. One of the key features of this category of narrative is the presence of a chain of narrators. The *Bhagavata,* therefore is an exemplary instance because it incorporates the device of chain narrators. Paniker refers to the two Indian epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat as Itihasa narratives. "The Itihasas are regular narratives on a grand style portraying the life of a people or a nation" (Paniker 41). Paniker has subtly diminished the itihasa/history dichotomy, and has focused on interpreting the itihasa narratives as literary works of magnanimous stature. Ramayan and Mahabharat, both, are the ancient-most stories of man with a presence of divine and demonic entity. While the Puranas exploit a literary technique of chain narrators, the srinkhala narratives have a device of chain stories. In this narrative form, usually, one tale leads to the other, and the tales flow in

a chain. There is also a frame story from which the lead story initiates. *Kathasaritsagara* is the key instance of such chain narratives in India. Allegory is a major literary device which is popular world-wide. It is not only for children; allegorical narratives deliver certain moral teachings for the adults as well. In India, the tales of Panchatantra tales are a key example of allegorical narratives.

According to Paniker, the mahakavyas or the grand narratives are "a later reformation of the same epic art" (Paniker 84). These narratives derive their primary resources from the epics, and were written for the royal court. However, the grand narratives are more organised, comparatively shorter in length compared to the epics, and incorporate the classical Indian literary techniques. Kalidasa's famous play, *Raghuvamsa,* is a major literary instance of a mahakavya. The Buddhist and Jain narratives, written in Pali and Prakrit, are considered to be anti-Brahmanical in nature. "While as narratives they do converge on many points, there are features in which the divergences are more significant than the convergences" (Paniker 97). These narratives correspond to the Jataka model. The term 'jataka' refers to the continuous travel of these narratives across generations. The Buddhist tales narrate the former births of Lord Buddha, and the Jain tales reflect a denunciation of life. The Dravidian narratives comprise of short and long narratives composed before and after Christ's birth. The model of the Tamil epic, *Cilappatikaram* is parallel to the mahakavya tradition of Sanskrit literature. They contain elements of human love as well as religious devotion. To elucidate on the folk and tribal narratives in India, Paniker states, "Uncodified, uncollected, unpublished yet, the tribal narrative in India is perhaps the richest, yet untapped, resource of the Indian narrative imagination" (Paniker 120). These narratives are essentially creations of communities. They are impersonal narrations, there is hardly any institutionalization associated with these narratives. Yet, these narratives are all-encompassing in terms of inclusion of diverse literary features. Paniker suggests an inclusion of the boundless, diverse narratives of India under this

category. The Miscellaneous narratives refer to the multilingual, multicultural, multimedia narrations that have enriched the Indian narrative tradition. Literary works like Banabhatta's *Kadambari* or Kalidasa's *Meghdutam,* and performative narratives like, *Kudiyattam* are included in this category.

Along with the categorisation of narratives Paniker also presents a categorisation of the **features** of Indian narratology. He suggests that these features are not specific to Indian narratives alone, they exist in international literatures as well. These features are highly instrumental in adding a critical dimension to the study of Indian narratives. A brief outline of these features would elucidate their significance further –

1. **Interiorisation-** There are Indian narratives which are multi-layered, and often, the exterior is contrastive to the interior. In such texts, the surface layer serves the purpose of alluring the readers who fail to notice the significance of the crux. A classic example of an Indian text that reflects interiorisation is *Valmiki Ramayana*. Overtly it appears as a story of an ideal prince who fights a war against a demon to rescue his wife. However, it is a multi-layered text which includes ideologies of the hero and the anti-hero, the complexities of Ram's character, and the consciousness of a hunter turned sage, i.e., Valmiki himself. Thus, as Paniker suggests, *Valmiki Ramayana* demonstrates an unceasing process of interiorisation.

2. **Serialisation –** Paniker refers to the device of Serialisation as the most commonly used narrative technique in Indian literature. A close study of the vast range of Indian narratives shows the authors and storytellers prefer continuous, serialised, multidimensional narratives over unified and unidimensional ones. Paniker cites Mahabharat as the typical illustration of a text that has demonstrated serialisation to the largest extent. In Mahabharat there are multiple subplots and substories (upakhyanas) which are often detachable from the central narrative,

and the detachment does not impact the main story. These substories add to the vastness of the epic and renders the epic a multidimensional structure.

3. **Fantasisation –** Paniker suggests that fantasisation as a narrative technique contributes to the interplay of imagination and reality. The Indian narrative tradition has internalised fantasy and its dominant presence can be located in the Vedas, the puranas, the epics, fairy tales, and folk tales. Ganga is not merely a river; she is also depicted as a beautiful queen and as the mother of Bhishma in Mahabharat (Paniker 10). This is a well-known instance from amongst countless others that have developed the Indian narrative tradition since the ancient times.

4. **Cyclicalisation –** Cyclicalisation refers to the feature of fluid temporality that has a noticeable presence in Indian narratives. The Indian philosophy of birth and re-birth is also believed to have a deep impact on this notion of cyclicalisation. The *Jataka* tales exemplify this literary feature. Cyclicalisation is also prominently noticeable in the mythic stories that keep getting recycled and circulated across ages and generations.

5. **Allegorisation –** Allegorisation is a popular and a potential medium for transmitting moral teaching in a subtle way. In allegorisation, inanimate objects are personified, and birds and animals are assigned human qualities. An allegory apparently seems to be a happy and simple world of non-humans, but values are often deeply imparted through the incorporation of this device. In India, the tales of *Panchatantra* is a classic example of this.

6. **Anonymisation –** Anonymisation is a dominant feature of Indian narratives. Not only literary but also a deep philosophical dimension too is associated with the notion of anonymisation. The classic instance of the feature of anonymisation in the Indian context is attributing the 'authorship' of Mahabharat to Vyasa. Although Vyasa is popularly believed to be the author of Mahabharat, the term 'vyasa' is a title that is conferred to an editor. Moreover, in the Indian oral narrative tradition, the majority of epic interpolations, the puranas, and the folk tales

largely owe their creation to anonymous authors. In the Indian context, anonymisation is significant because it is the one of the key impetuses behind the narrative flexibility, plurality and diversity of these narratives.

7. **Elasticisation of Time –** The other major factor that adds to the narrative flexibility in the Indian scenario is the idea of elasticisation of time. "Narrative time in Indian texts is more psychological in character than logical" (Paniker 14). "Once upon a time" is perhaps the most favourite phrase with the Indian storytellers; and they are unconcerned regarding the exact timelines of their stories. Whether an event took place in 100 BC OR 100 AD, it has hardly any impact on their creation of stories.

8. **Spatialisation –** More than time, the space where the story is set has greater importance in the Indian narrative tradition. Paniker suggests that the significance of space has a predominance in the tradition of Asian narratives as a whole. Therefore, even though the Mahabharat is believed to have been composed sometime between 300 BC and 300 AD, i.e., a span of six hundred years, yet places like Hastinapur, Indraprastha, and Mathura are quite definite. Further, these places also directly contribute to the understanding of the epic storyline.

9. **Stylisation and Improvisation –** Paniker has clubbed together the features of stylisation and improvisation. He contends that these two features are interrelated yet juxtaposed against each other. While stylisation refers to the inclusion of structure and organisation which are specific to respective authors, improvisation offers the scope and liberty to interpret a narrative according to one's social, cultural, and psychological orientation. "Stylisation is discipline, improvisation is freedom" (Paniker 16).

Paniker highlights the lack of theoretical interest regarding fictional prose narrative in the domain of ancient Indian literary criticism and theory. He refutes the popular belief that the Middle Ages in India is to be referred to as a dark age. He refers to the medieval age in India

as, “a period of great diversification and decentralisation” (Paniker 156). Paniker suggests that the Middle Ages in India showcased a major progress in regional literature. Literary activities from different parts of India started gaining popularity during this time and led to a subtle literary revolution. Sanskrit or ancient Tamil, which were considered to be primary languages were losing their supremacy as medium of literary expression. Regional languages which remained outside the mainstream, started flourishing. There was an evolution in the literary landscape across India. Previously marginalised literatures were centralised. Authors and poets of regional languages and literatures exhibited awareness of their identities and they claimed their position in the literary scenario of India. Greater variety and diversity of literary exercise emerged which displayed subaltern expressions.

A literary upheaval could be seen to have manifested itself in multiple ways. Mass movements like bhakti and sufi reflected a diverse and inclusive socio-cultural value system. “Regional cultures were asserting their own rights, thereby turning Indian ethos into a mosaic of multifarious perceptions, beliefs, practices, and manifestations” (Paniker 156). Readers of regional languages expressed their desire to read the epics and puranas in their respective vernacular languages. This paved the way for the enormous body of translations of Ramayan and Mahabharat. The regional languages, therefore, became the primary ground for the diverse Indian literatures and cultures to flourish. The innate aspects of plurality and diversity of Indian literary tradition were reinforced with a greater vigour than before. It is this linguistic and cultural diversity that has enriched the domain of Indian literature across ages. The two epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat have evolved in their own way through different interpretations through different ages, and every mythic narrative that has been produced can claim to be an individual narrative in its own merit. Hence, the notion of a sacrosanct Ur-text has not remained associated with Ramayan and Mahabharat.

The cultural evolution towards a pluralistic society gained an impetus from the indigenous religious movements like Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, etc. There was an increase in protest literature as well. The *kirtana* movement also evolved as a remarkable cultural phenomenon. People at the grassroot level subverted the upper-class, and upper-caste hegemony of producing and consuming literature. All these put together ensured a decentralisation and massive diversification of literary tradition in India. Paniker comments that the perspective of the narrative has to change whenever there is a change in the speaker and the listener. The activity and tradition of storytelling has to continue. It is an inherent part of human civilization, of human existence. In the Indian context, he suggests that exploration and theorization is required to assess and analyse the tools of storytelling and the nature of narratives

In *Indian Narratology*, Paniker theorises the vast and diverse narrative opportunities that the Indian literary tradition has to offer. He suggests that new narrative ways and techniques should locate their significance against the backdrop of the ancient narrative tradition. This subsequently will contribute to the progress and enrichment of the Indian narrative tradition as a whole. He comprehensively outlines different types of new narratives that have been emerging in contemporary India. Women writers have chosen to tell their stories from the perspective of women. Revisionist mythopoeia is an evolving domain which is enriched by female authors' narratives that re-envisage the traditional interpretation of the Indian epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat. The marginalised characters in the epics have also been given voices in many contemporary Indian narratives – a literary tendency which highlights the inclusive nature of Indian *sahitya* and Indian narrative history. Paniker further comments that, "The downtrodden people are rediscovering their own potential and the tribals are beginning to invent new roles for themselves, and in this process they will all create new forms of narrative" (Paniker 153). He strongly suggests that the narrative practice in India

should include and initiate critical dialogues on these narratives. Paniker concludes his book with this hope that as long as interested readers exist, stories and storytelling would never cease to exist. “Stories and story telling will never end. Every story is linked to every other story through the act of telling” (K. Paniker 158).

2.5 Research Gap

In the domain of mythic narrative writing, there is a hierarchy of characters in the context of representation. Some characters find unequivocally more narrative representations than others. Seminal texts like Irawati Karve’s *Yuganta* or Kevin McGrath’s *STRI: Feminine Power in the Mahabharata* do not include characters like Satyavati. Similarly, Paula Richman’s *Many Ramayanas* mostly focuses on the narrativity of Ramayan, and on characters like Ram and Sita. There is one chapter on Surpanakha, but characters like Manthara and Urmila are not included. *The Mahabharata Revisited*, edited by TRS Sharma, *The Ramayana Revisited* edited by Mandakranta Bose, *Reflections and Variations on The Mahabharata* consists of scholarly essays that substantially contribute to the understanding of the epics. However, essays focusing on the ‘epic’ characters tend to include a few dominant characters. Essays like, “When Women Retell the Ramayana” by Nabaneeta Dev Sen and “Clearing Sacred Ground: Women-Centered Interpretations of the Indian Epics” by Rashmi Luthra primarily focus on Sita and Draupadi. The list of this type of texts is not exhaustively presented here due to limited scope. However, a tendency can be noticed about the absence of certain characters in popular writings as well as scholarly articles. This is an existing research gap. The primary texts selected for the study reexplores these marginalised characters. Here, the idea of ‘marginalised’ refer to the marginalization of characters from the perspective of their representation. Further, an analysis of these texts and characters, from the point of view of narratology, has not been attempted majorly in India. Moreover, the primary texts are relatively

recent publications. Except for *Sita's Sister* and *Lanka's Princess*, the other primary texts remain largely unexplored in the academic domain. This is also a potent research gap that the present research aims to address.

Chapter 3

Narratological Components and Textual Analysis

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents an analysis of four narratological components – story and plot (here referred together as one component), point of view, temporality, and spatiality. An understanding of the distinction between the story and the plot offers an insight into how the plot of a fictional text represents the story. Further, the point of view adopted in a fiction, reflects the focalization and the narrator's perspective in a text. Temporality is a significant factor to understand the story time and the narrative time, the distinction between them, and the hierarchy of narrative events in a plot. Spatiality or spatialization is an important narratological component to understand how the geographical locale in which a text is situated contribute to the understanding of a text. The chapter comprises theoretical analyses of each component as done by different narratologists from both classical and postclassical phases, and further presents textual analysis based on the selected components. The chapter argues that the importance of certain narrative events over others and the prominence of certain perspectives, as done in the selected texts, contributes to the representation of a different perspective in reading the traditional epic narratives.

3.2 Story and plot

Story and plot are two essential narrative components in a fictional text. The distinction between the notions of story and plot constitutes an important aspect of narratology. This distinction significantly contributes to the formation of a text and also plays a pivotal role in the communicative process of it. The distinction between these two narrative components was introduced by E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (Herman and Vervaeck 11). This book was published in 1927. The year of publication of the book suggests that it precedes the emergence

of narratology as a literary theory. However, Forster's idea contributes to the domain of narratology to understand the concepts of story and plot. Later, structuralist narratologists further developed this distinction, and also attributed technical terms to the components of story and plot (Herman and Vervaeck 11). These technical terms are specific to the field of narratology.

Forster refers to story as the backbone of a novel (Forster 22). He states that the concept of story is an ancient idea. He outlines the core aspect of the concept of story. He suggests that the crux of a story is determined by a question – "What would happen next?" (Forster 22). Forster opines that this curiosity is primeval. The temporal arrangements of a story satisfy this curiosity. "It is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence" (Forster 22). Forster states, "It is the lowest and simplest of literary organisms. Yet it is the highest factor common to all the very complicated organisms known as novels" (Forster 22). His definition of plot includes the idea of causality along with temporality, which is already inherent in the concept of story. He further suggests that plot can be potentially detached from the story. It transcends the **what** and demonstrates the **how** of a narrative. Forster's definition of story and plot refers to the distinction between the temporal and causal arrangements in a narrative. However, the distinction between temporality and causality cannot be easily determined. This subsequently suggests that the distinction between story and plot is not absolute (Herman and Vervaeck III), rather, these elements are interconnected. This idea of the interconnectedness of story and plot is one of the central ideas of narratology, both in its classical and postclassical phases.

Tzvetan Todorov introduced the distinction between story and plot in the domain of classical narratology in 1966. He puts forward his idea in his essay, "The Categories of Literary Narrative". Todorov referred to plot as discourse. Hence, what he proposed is a distinction between story and discourse. In French, he referred to story as *historie* and discourse as

discours (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 566). This distinction in structuralist narratology has a close connection to the distinction between signifier and signified, which is a key concept of Saussurean linguistics. In narratology, story corresponds to the idea of signified and plot is referred to as the signifier. The other major influence behind this structuralist distinction between story and plot has been drawn from the Russian formalist distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*. *Fabula* refers to the basic story and *sjuzhet* refers to the arrangements in which the story is told (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 566).

The ground-breaking contribution regarding this distinction was made by Gerald Genette in 1980 in his seminal book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Jonathan Culler, in the Introduction to *Narrative Discourse* writes, "Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* is invaluable because it fills this need for a systematic theory of narrative" (Genette 7). In this book, Genette presents a narratological analysis of Marcel Proust's *Recherche du temps perdu*. This analysis emerged with a vast taxonomy in narratology which is popularly known as the Genettean taxonomy, and this taxonomy has since been the primary guideline for the developments that have happened in the field of narrative research. Genette categorised the narrative distinction between story and plot in **three** levels – narrating, narrative and story. "I propose to use the word *story* for the signified or narrative content, to use the word *narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself, and to use the word *narrating* for the producing narrative action" (Genette 27), writes Genette. In French, story corresponds to the term, *historie* and narrative to *recit* (Genette 27). Narrative that appears as concrete to the readers is the plot of the text; whereas, the story is an abstract idea. The story refers to the chronological sequence of how events take place which might get altered at the plot level.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983) further develops Genette's classification of story (*historie*), narrative (*recit*), and narrating. She labels

historie as story; *recit* as text; and narrating as narration (Rimmon-Kenan 3). According to Rimmon-Kenan, story is the succession of events that are narrated, although they are abstracted from their disposition in the text. Plot is termed as text by her. The text is the verbal discourse which manifests the story. Here, story emerges as the object of the text. Narration, the third category, refers to the process of the production of the text i.e. the plot. Rimmon-Kenan's theory, further, focuses on the narrative components of events and participants in those events. She postulates that the narrated events along with the participants are chronologically arranged in story. In consonance with Genette's theory, Rimmon-Kenan too suggests that the chronological arrangement of events at the story level often gets reconstructed at the plot level, i.e., at the level of the text. "Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective" (Rimmon-Kenan 3). However, the narrative components of events and participants form a key aspect of Rimmon-Kenan's model. She opines that narrative fiction essentially includes a succession of events and the participants (characters) who function in those events. However, the succession of events in a story might not be narrated in a chronological manner in the plot and every narrated event do not have the same narrative significance in the plot development of a fiction.

In "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", Roland Barthes presents his analysis on the distinction between two types of narrated events. He opines that there are certain events in a fictional narrative that contribute to the development of the main plot. These types of narrated events perform the 'cardinal functions' (Barthes 248). The narrated events that reflect the crisis and the solution to the crisis in a narrative, perform the cardinal functions. Barthes refers to these events as the nuclei of the text. There are peripheral events that contribute to the function of the nuclei but are not of key significance in the text. Barthes refers

to these events as catalysts or catalyses. Seymour Chatman further develops this idea in his book, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Like Barthes, Chatman too postulates, "Narrative events have not only a logical connection, but also a logic of *hierarchy*. Some are more important than others" (Chatman 53). Chatman refers to the important events as the kernel of a narrative. The main plot of a fictional text consists of the kernel. There are other events in the subplot or events that surround the kernel. Chatman calls these events the satellites. "Their function is that of filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel; they form the flesh on the skeleton" (Chatman 54). This research identifies and analyses the narrative events that form the kernel and satellites of the plots of the selected text. Further, this study examines how the kernels of the plot contribute to the understanding of characterization, which is a key objective of this study.

Story and plot in the selected texts

The present research seeks to examine selected contemporary Indian mythic texts. Each of these texts centres around a character, and episodes related to that character, from either Ramayan or Mahabharat. The essential feature that is common through all the selected texts is the type of their protagonist. The protagonists of these texts have often remained less explored in popular tellings of the epics. The authors of the selected texts have attempted to question the dominant representations of these characters. They have interpreted the dominant tellings of the epic and have woven the plot of their respective stories which offer a fresh perspective towards the understanding of these characters. Emma Dawson Varughese, in her essay, "Post-Millenial 'Mythology-Inspired Fiction' in English", outlines four prominent approaches which can be discerned in the context of contemporary mythic fiction that are written in India. These approaches are –

i. Texts which follow the storyline of the dominant tellings of the epics. These texts reflect least novelty in interpreting the age-old epic stories. Example – *The Secret of God's Son* by Usha Narayan.

ii. Texts which draw major influence from the dominant tellings, but show difference in plot and characterization. Example – 'Shiva Trilogy' by Amish Tripathi.

iii. Texts which re-present the archetypal, epic characters and storyline situating them in contemporary settings and employing relevant subgenres to them. Example – Mahashweta Devi's *Dopdi*.

iv. Texts that adapt an episode(s) or a character(s) from the dominant tellings of the epics and develop a fresh narrative significantly removed from the source version. These texts often reimagine an episode of an epic and present a new perspective. Example – Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* (Varughese 146).

The texts selected for this research can be categorized under the second approach mentioned above, i.e. – the interpretations that display prominent influence drawn from the popular tellings of the epics, however, the characterization is significantly different, even to the extent of being subversive. In the given context, an examination of the plot structure of these narratives becomes important to understand the functions of the characters in the given texts.

The plot of Kavita Kane's ***Sita's Sister*** narrates the story of Sita's sister, Urmila. Urmila was the first born of King Seeradhwaj, Janak of Mithila and Queen Sunaina (Kane 11). However, the royal couple had adopted Sita before Urmila was born, hence, Sita came to be known as Mithila's eldest princess. Later, marrying Ram, she became the eldest daughter-in-law to the royal family of Kosala in Ayodhya. Kane, in her narrative, chooses to assign Urmila the protagonist's role who otherwise has remained overshadowed by the towering presence of

Sita in the domain of Ramayan narratives. Kane has written the novel in the narrative style of a bildungsroman. The novel opens with a Prologue titled "The Four Sisters" which introduces the four sisters, Sita, Urmila, Mandavi, and Shrutakirti of Mithila.

The plot of *Sita's Sister* narrates a story that has mostly remained unheard. Kane weaves the plot to highlight the aspects of Urmila's character that otherwise remain unnoticed. The narration manifests Urmila as an able princess, well-trained with the knowledge of the scriptures as well as warfare. She is illustrious and wise. As the plot unfolds, the narrative element which emerges to be of cardinal function in this text, i.e. the kernel of the text, is Lakshman's decision to accompany Ram and Sita to the exile. Kane, in this text, primarily follows Valmiki's epic in including the narrative events that involve Urmila. However, the digression takes place in the narration since it is represented from Urmila's perspective. The kernel reflects the digression. Ram's fourteen years of exile and Lakshman's absence, is used as a trope that creates a scope for Urmila's prominent presence in the narrative.

Through the kernel, Urmila's character represents an often-unnoticed aspect of the Ramayan story. The plot demonstrates how a young and illustrious princess of Mithila evolves as a resolute and responsible daughter-in-law in Ayodhya. The plot represents a love story of Urmila and Lakshman which parallels the story of Ram and Sita. It tells the story about how she became indispensable for Kaushalya and Sumitra after Ram and Lakshman left Ayodhya. The narration, further captures Urmila's complex relationship with Kaikeyi, and the instrumental role she played in assisting Bharat to rule the kingdom in Ram's absence. The plot also highlights Urmila's sacrifice as a newly-wed young princess since she had to part from her husband for fourteen years. Furthermore, it narrates a story of injustice that Urmila was subjected to. Her parents adopted Sita before she was born, hence Sita enjoyed the status of the eldest princess of Mithila and Urmila was deprived of her rights. In Ayodhya, the injustice was

even prominent. She was deprived of her agency in making decisions for herself. Lakshman decided that she would have to live a life of separation without even asking her for her choice. The plot of *Sita's Sister* is all-encompassing in narrating the story of Urmila as an independent entity who has a significant role to play in the Ramayan narrative.

Similar to *Sita's Sister*, the plot of Kane's ***Lanka's Princess*** represents the narrative technique of bildungsroman. Surpanakha is the protagonist of the novel. Surpanakha, the princess of Lanka, is referred to as Meenakshi in this text. The plot signifies a multidimensional and intricate story. Meenakshi is at the center of the narration. However, the plot includes numerous other characters who add to the plot development. The dynamics between these characters, and the complexity of their relationship with Meenakshi seem to be a deterrent in discerning a singular narrative event that have a crucial role to play in the plot. There are multiple narrative elements that play cardinal functions. The plot exhibits multiple transgressions from the popular perception of Surpanakha's character and her presence in the Ramayan story. The narrative elements that play the cardinal functions include Meenakshi being deprived of her mother's love for being a girl child, she being dominated by the towering presence of Ravan in the family, and most importantly, the death of her husband, Vidyujiva and of her son, Kumar. One of the major deviations is noticed in the limited narrative scope that Ram and Lakshman have. They have a lesser presence in the kernel of the plot contrary to the dominant tellings of Ramayan.

The plot has a linear structure. The plot narrates the tale of Meenakshi from her birth to her death. Further, Kane adds a prologue and an epilogue to the main narration which transcends beyond her birth as Surpanakha, and captures a glimpse of her subsequent lives. The prologue and epilogue complete Surpanakha's story. Kane portrays her character from a broader perspective going beyond the event of her mutilation that has remained immensely

popular in the context of Surpanakha's character in Ramayan. *Lanka's Princess* is not merely the story of Ravan's sister who was disfigured by Lakshman. It is a representation of Meenakshi's character situating her both in the spectrum of her family and in a larger spectrum of Lanka. The plot signifies a story that deviates from the popular narratives on Surpanakha.

"Meenakshi", "Manthara", and "Shanta" are three stories by Anand Neelakantan which are analysed in this research. These stories are part of Neelakantan's book, *Valmiki's Women*. In this book, Neelakantan re-explores five female characters from Ramayan. The story, "**Meenakshi**" centers around Surpanakha's character. Like Kane, Neelakantan also refers to Surpanakha as Meenakshi. The plot signifies a story that deviates from the popular narratives on Surpanakha. In this text, Neelakantan portrays Meenakshi in her old age. An old, disfigured, impoverished Meenakshi roams in the streets of Ayodhya. The plot narrates the story of one significant day. It is on that day that Sita has to leave Ayodhya after Ram abandons her. The plot captures an encounter between Sita and Meenakshi, both wronged by Ram in different ways. While Meenakshi was mutilated, Sita was deprived of her rights as a wife and a queen. Neelakantan introduces another female character in the plot. It is the character of a street-dweller *chandal* woman who is referred to as chandali in the text. The conversation between Meenakshi and chandali constitutes the major part of the narration. This conversation emerges to be a medium of expression for Meenakshi. She recollects her past, contemplates on her present and ponders on the epic conflict between Ram and Ravan from her perspective.

Chandali has a poverty-stricken life. She reciprocates Meenakshi expressing her plight. However, the kernel of the plot is the encounter between Sita, Meenakshi and chandali which is narrated towards the end of the story. While leaving Ayodhya, Sita happens to meet Meenakshi and they both relive the past for a moment. "Now I think the war was futile, Meenakshi. If he (Ram) had to forsake me, why did he rescue me from Lanka? Why did he kill

Ravana? (Neelakantan 218), says Sita. Further, she condemns the violence that Lakshman unleashed on Meenakshi and comments, “Thinking back, sometimes I feel your brother’s anger and thirst for revenge was justified” (Neelakantan 218). Towards the end of the story, Neelakantan unites Meenakshi, Sita, and chandali in a bond of solidarity. This narrative element has the cardinal function in this text which potentially alters the popular perception regarding the animosity between Sita and Meenakshi.

Neelakantan reexplores Manthara’s story in “**Manthara**”. Like Surpanakha, the character of Manthara from Ramayan is often identified as an evil character. Manthara is the hunchback, female servant who accompanied Kaikeyi to Ayodhya and lived with her. She is infamous for being the primary cause behind Ram’s exile. According to the popular tellings of Ramayan, Manthara instigated Kaikeyi to compel Dasharath to disinherit Ram from the throne and coronate Bharat as the king of Ayodhya. In “Manthara”, Neelakantan narrates Manthara’s story from her perspective. The plot traces how she becomes an affectionate mother figure to Kaikeyi and transcends beyond the image of an ‘ugly hunchback’ that is popularly associated with her character.

King Ashwapati, the king of Kaikeya banishes his queen, devotes himself to asceticism, and decides to spend the rest of his life practicing celibacy. He purposely needed the ‘ugliest’ woman in the kingdom to take care of his little children, Yudhajit and Kaikeyi. Manthara fulfilled the criterion. “‘I purposely chose you…I only wanted the ugliest woman on earth’, the king said” (Neelakantan 76). “Manthara” is the story about how ‘the ugliest woman’ in Kaikeya evolves as an affectionate mother figure to a princess who was deprived of maternal love. The plot, in linear progression, captures Manthara’s journey from Kaikeya to Ayodhya and highlights how she perceives the happenings in her life. Her intention to protect the rights of Kaikeyi and Bharat and acting towards it plays the cardinal narrative function in the plot. In

"Manthara", Neelakantan approaches the episode from Ramayan that involves Manthara and re-presents a different story. He reimagines Manthara's character and highlights the injustice that she was subjected to. The plot offers an altered perspective on her narrative presence in the dominant tellings of Ramayan.

"**Shanta**" is the story of Ram's elder sister, Dasharath and Kaushalya's first child. However, she does not find a mention in Valmiki's Ramayan. Her reference is found in the *Vana* (*Aranya*) parva of Mahabharat. Devdutt Pattanaik writes about Shanta in his web-article titled, "The story of Ram's elder sister". He recounts that apart from Mahabharat, Shanta's references are also found in Telugu folk songs and in selected Odiya tellings of Ramayan. In Telugu folk songs, Shanta appears as an upright elder sibling to Ram who furiously condemns him for abandoning Sita. Also, a comparatively more detailed reference to her character is found in tellings of Odiya Ramayan. However, Shanta has remained ignored in the popular representations of Ramayan. Neelakantan highlights this character who has otherwise remained unheard. He attempts to explore Shanta's character and situate her presence in the Ramayan story.

The plot opens with Shanta sitting on a lonely cliff, where, usually she finds peace of mind since the palace suffocates her. "She loved sitting here, far away from her father's palace where she felt stifled. She had never felt at home in Saketa; never felt wanted. She always felt like an intruder; an unwelcomed guest who had overstayed" (Neelakantan 23). These initial lines set the tone of the entire text. Shanta, the young girl of sixteen, learnt at an early age that she was never desired by her parents. They always craved for a son. Thus, she finds peace in the lap of nature, and eventually, she permanently disowns the royal lifestyle. The plot has a linear progression and Shanta's marriage to Sage Rishyasringa is the kernel of the plot. This narrative element plays the cardinal function in the plot development because this marriage

manifests the significance of her character in the Ramayan narrative, which has often been omitted in the popular representations of the Ramayan story. The plot narrates Shanta's effort in marrying Rishyasringa who was tied to the vow of celibacy. Later, Rishyasringa presided over the *putrakamesti yajnya* (a sacred ritual performed before fire in expectation of a son's birth) which resulted in the birth of Dasharath's four illustrious sons. Neelakantan, in this story, assigns Shanta the key role behind Ram's birth and the popular Ramayan narrative is reimagined from a fresh point of view.

In Sharath Komarraju's story, "**Priestess**", the kernel appears later in the narration. "Priestess" is the first of the three stories in Komarraju's *The Rise of Hastinapur*. This book is an interpretation of Mahabharat from the perspective of three female characters. Komarraju has given an account of events which led to the main events of the epic i.e. the war of Kurukshetra. He approaches the age-old Mahabharat story from a different perspective. In the course of narration, the epic loses its grandeur but gains a human colour. Komarraju's text depicts that the mighty men were not the sole decisive factor of the great war, and not everything was on a larger-than-life scale. He re-views the characters of Amba, Pritha (Kunti), and Gandhari through a lens that transgresses the perceptions that commonly exist about their characters, and explores their role in the epic turn of events. The readers encounter the known characters in new images and the known story with new dimensions. In this text Komarraju interprets the potential reasons leading to the war. And he brings to the fore the significant role that the three women characters, Amba, Pritha and Gandhari played in the grand epic.

The book is divided into three parts: Book One, Book Two and Book Three. The first book is named "Priestess", the second, "The Black Stone", and the third, "The City of Gold". All the three parts initiate with a prologue entitled, "Ganga Speaks". In the prologue to Book One, Ganga apprehends Bhishma's fall and the fall of Hastinapur. She foresees Bhishma's

destruction, “He would be destroyed- as all powerful men eventually are- by the consequences of their action, by the ache they cause through their choices. Amba’s tale, then, is also the first chapter in the tale of Devavrata’s ruin” (Komarraju,5). Here Bhishma is referred to as Devavrata. The story of “Priestess” is absolutely in abstraction from its plot. The plot is introduced by Ganga. In the prologue she subtly refers to the kernel of the plot which is - Amba’s resolution to destroy Bhishma. Bhishma’s rejection to marry Amba is a narrative element with a cardinal function in the plot i.e. the kernel. The other narrated events, for instance, Amba seeking Sage Parashuram’s blessings to kill Bhishma, her subsequent penance to attain a boon from Shiva to avenge the wrong done to her, and the birth of Shikhandini revolve around this event and function as the satellites. The plot of “Priestess” lays the foundation for the following chapters involving Pritha and Gandhari through which the epic story of Mahabharat is revisited and represented by Komarraju.

The tale, “Priestess” begins with Amba’s return to Salva in Saubala (Komarraju 7) and the narration oscillates between the past (in flashback) and present. The narrators also alter. In places that Amba recalls her experience with Bhishma, she is assigned the first person narration. While the rest of the plot is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator. In the Prologue, Ganga displaces the male narrator’s voice. “I will describe to you the holy thoughts of that great sage who is venerated in the entire world, Vyasa, the performer of wonderful deeds” (Debroy 3), says Souti Ugrashrava to the hermit Shounaka in the Adi Parva of Mahabharat. In Komarraju’s story, it is Ganga who contemplates on the events that ultimately culminated in the war of Kurukshetra, and she begins her narration with Amba’s story. “Priestess” is a story that highlights Amba’s role in the destruction of Hastinapur. But more than that, it narrates Amba’s story, a tale of injustice and deprivation which has often remained unnoticed.

Amba is also the protagonist of Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan's ***The One Who Had Two Lives***. The book is divided into two parts named "Part One: Amba" and "Part Two: Shikhandini". As the titles of the two parts suggest, in the first part, Madhavan presents the story of Amba followed by a comparatively shorter second part in which she depicts Shikhandini's tale. However, Madhavan does not mention the war of Kurukshetra in the main text. She adds an Epilogue in the end which includes Shikhandini's role in the war. The two parts distinctly narrate the story of Amba's two lives. According to the story of Vyasa's Mahabharat, Amba, the eldest princess Kashi was reborn as Shikhandini to avenge the wrong that Bhishma had done to her in her previous birth. The title, *The One Who Had Two Lives* suggests that it is a reexploration of both Amba and Shikhandini's character. This research focuses only on Amba's character.

There is also a part of narration that connects the two parts of the book known as "The In-Between". This part narrates Amba's rigorous penance and death. The connecting section, however, is of immense significance. The kernel of the plot lies in this section. It is during this arduous time of penance that Amba asks Shiva to fulfil her wish to be born as a warrior who would kill Bheeshma. "And I wish to be reborn as the warrior who will kill Bheeshma. Do you hear me, Shiva? A maiden, a blameless princess, asks you this" (Madhavan 146). The plot of the first part narrates the story of Amba and her sisters Ambika and Ambalika and their journey from Kashi to Hastinapur which was forced upon them by Bheeshma. Part two is the story of Shikhandini who was born as a girl but was brought up as a boy and had to struggle all her life in quest of her identity. And the narrative events in between part one and two offer the most significant part of the story, the end of Amba's story and the beginning of Shikhandini's tale. *The One Who Had Two Lives* is a story of injustice, suffering and revenge. It is a reimagination of Amba's tale, a tale that has often remained at the periphery of the popular representations of Mahabharat.

The One Who Swam with the Fishes is the other book by Madhavan included in this research. Satyavati, the grand matriarch of the Kuru dynasty is the protagonist of this text. Like, *The One Who Had Two Lives*, the title of this book is also self-explanatory and is focused on the protagonist. The protagonist is Matsyagandhi, the girl who smelled like fish. The plot narrates how she evolved to be the beautiful Satyavati who married King Shantanu and became the queen of Hastinapur. The narration of the text is disjunctive. It oscillates between the past and the present through alternate chapters. The past is referred to as 'Then' and the present as 'Now', although, the past is not a long gone past. It narrates the story of Matsyagandhi's birth and her young days. The present is her encounter with Shantanu and their subsequent marriage. The temporal gap between the past and present is brief. The plot opens with 'Now' when Matsyagandhi is a fourteen-year-old girl waiting to meet Shantanu when the king comes to a visit the part of his kingdom nearby to her village.

Oscillating between the past and the present, the plot simultaneously narrates the past and the present through Matsyagandhi's first person narration. The 'past' is the history of her birth, her younger days with her parents and her brother Chitravasu, her struggle with the poverty that their family suffered, and most importantly, her encounter with Sage Parashar that changed her life. The 'present' narrates the story of the ambitious Matsyagandhi who succeeds in fulfilling her aim to rise above her down-trodden, poverty-stricken state to be a queen by marrying the king of Hastinapur. Matsyagandhi's union with Parashar transformed her from the fish-smelling Matsyagandhi to the lotus-smelling Satyavati. This becomes instrumental in her union with Shantanu later. However, the narration involving these events are satellites and not the kernel. The narrative element that plays the cardinal function is the smallest chapter of the book. It narrates Matsyagandhi and Shantanu's wedding in three lines, "The king reaches for my hand. We are wedded, a simple ceremony on the banks of the river, my father pressing my cupped palms on top of my husband's. I am queen" (Madhavan 145). The story ends with

the young queen Matsyagandhi heading towards Hastinapur after her wedding. The plot traces the fisher-girl Matsyagandhi's journey until she becomes the queen. Her story of becoming the grand matriarch of the Kuru clan, that is popularly known in connection to Satyavati's character, has been left out of the narrative scope of this text.

Satyavati is also the protagonist of Kane's ***The Fisher Queen's Dynasty***. Kane's novels represent a linear, chronological order of narrative events. However, the plots of her novels are intricate and complex because of the presence of multiple characters, their perspectives, and multiple narrative events that involve them. Hence, as already mentioned, a singular narrative event that performs the cardinal function cannot be identified. *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* also, keeping Satyavati at the centre, includes multiple characters with diverse viewpoints. From the multiple significant narrative events, four events can be identified that perform cardinal functions in the plot development. These events can be referred to as the kernels of the plot. The first kernel is Satyavati's birth and the rejection she faced from her biological father, King Vasu. She was adopted by Dasharaj, the chieftain of the fishing community and grew up as Kali, the fisher girl. The rejection she faced at birth motivated her to rise above her status and attain a royal status. The second kernel is, Satyavati's encounter with Parashar. From this encounter and the union between them, she became the mother of Vyasa and got transformed to the lotus-smelling Yojanagandhi. The third is her marriage with Shantanu which ensured her royal position that she was deprived of at her birth. And the fourth and most significant kernel is her decision to involve her son Vyasa to engage in *niyoga* with Ambika and Ambalika. Making this decision, Satyavati ensured the progression of the Kuru clan. The rest of the plot is woven around these four kernels, includes the satellites and completes Satyavati's story.

The story and plot together refer to the primary narrative component of these texts. The narrative element of point of view further contributes to the understanding of these narratives.

3.3 Point of View

The concept of point of view in a novel was introduced by Henry James in his seminal essay, "The Art of Fiction", written in 1884. James comments, in the context of narration in a fictional text, "There is a traditional difference between that which people know and that which they agree to admit that they know, that which they see and that which they speak of" (James 11). The distinction between what is seen and what is being spoken of in a novel paved the way for the distinction between **who sees** and **who speaks** which is a core concern of structural narratology. This distinction has been the basis of Genette's notion of focalization. Genette's idea was further revised by Mieke Bal. Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan also based her analysis of point of view on Genette's idea of focalization, and so did Wolf Schmid. Genette's idea operates as a foundation to the concept of point of view in narratology. His significant contribution to the understanding of the notion of point of view can be divided into two segments. One is the distinction between **who sees** and **who speaks** and the other is the categorization of three types of focalizations – internal focalization, external focalization and zero focalization. Theorists like Bal, Rimmon- Kennan, and Schmid have developed their theories of point of view on the basis of these two segments that Genette postulated.

The basis of Genette's distinction between **who sees** and **who speaks** refers to another distinction, i.e. between mood and voice, two prominent terms from the Genettean taxonomy. Mood refers to the regulation of the narrative information presented in a fictional text. It is further divided into two categories – distance and perspective. Precisely, the factor of who sees refers to the character whose point of view is presented in a text, and who speaks refers to the narrator. Further, Genette posits the notion of focalization which includes the interrelation

between the characters' and the narrator's knowledge that is represented in a fictional narrative. He divides focalization into three categories – internal, external, and zero. Internal focalization takes place when the narrator knows and says and narrates as much as the character(s) knows. External focalization takes place in narratives where the narrator's knowledge is lesser than the character's knowledge. Zero focalization happens when the narrator knows and says more than the character(s) know or say.

Bal further revised Genette's idea of focalization. In the second edition of her seminal book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. She states, "Focalization is the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the content of a narrative text" (Bal 135). Bal differs from Genette in introducing the component of focalizer in the concept of focalization. "The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed" (Bal 135). The fundamental difference between Genette's and Bals' notions occurs here as Bal's concept of focalizer is neither the narrator nor the character. Rather, it refers to a narrative point from which the narrative elements are viewed and subsequently narrated. However, she suggests that in most narratives the focalizer lies either in a character or within an external agent. Precisely, focalizer, according to Bal refers to the point of departure towards perceiving the point of view of the character(s) in a narrative. In other words, a focalizer emerges as a potential factor in determining the perspective of a narrative. Rimmon-Kennan emphasizes on the visual aspect of Genette's theory of focalization. She focuses on the factors that shape how the narrative elements can be viewed to subsequently identify the point of view of a fictional text. She outlines three facets of focalization in her book, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, which are – i) the perceptual facet, ii) the psychological facet, and iii) the ideological facet. This distinction between the three types of facets contributes to an in-depth evaluation of the narrative content and its perspective.

Wolf Schmid draws inspiration from the Genettean notion of point of view. However, his idea is postulated in the postclassical phase of narratology, hence, has distinct features that do not completely resemble the classical, Genettean idea. Schmid states, "Without point of view, there is no story. A story is only constituted at all when the amorphous, continuous happenings are subjected to a selecting and hierarchizing viewpoint" (Schmid 99). He suggests that the point of view of a story is demonstrated through the happenings that are narrated in that story. He distinguishes between two narrative factors – comprehension and representation. He opines that often these two factors appear in binary opposition. The binary opposition takes place when there is a non-concurrence between what the narrator comprehends and what they represent. Schmid further posits that this gap leads to a binary opposition of point of views, i.e. the binary of narratorial point of view vs figural point of view. Narratorial point of view refers to the perspective of the narrator, and when a narrator assumes characters' standpoint, it reflects figural point of view. A significant alteration takes place in the understanding of the concept of point of view through Schmid's theory. He posits that any fictional text will either be narrated from a narratorial point of view or from a figural one. Hence, there cannot be a neutral perspective in a text. "The binary quality results from the fact that a narrative work can represent, in one and the same section of text, two perceiving, evaluating, speaking and actional entities, two centers for the generation of meaning: the narrator and the character. There is no third possibility" (Schmid 105). Schmid's analysis of point of view in narratology negates the idea of superiority of the narrator over character(s) or vice versa in a text. Rather, his analysis assigns an autonomy to either of the entities as the one who generates the meaning of the text.

Points of view as displayed in the selected texts

Point of view is a significant narratological component in the present research. The research focuses on selected less explored epic characters and aims to analyse how their points

of view have been represented in the selected mythic narratives. Kane's texts exhibit a narratorial point of view. Among the other texts, some are narrated by a third person narrator, while some are narrated by a character in first person narration, but they present a figural point of view. ***Sita's Sister*** is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator with a narratorial point of view. The text is primarily Urmila's story. However, the narrator focuses on other characters and their perspectives as well. The presence of the perspectives of characters like, Lakshman, Sita, Mandavi, Shrutakirti, Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, Manthara, and Sunaina offer a better understanding of the entire narrative in which Urmila takes the central place. The narratorial point of view, in this text, reflects Sita's viewpoint as the adopted princess of Mithila, the eldest of the four sisters, and the eldest daughter-in-law of the royal family in Ayodhya. Mandavi and Shrutakirti find their voices through the narration. Kaushalya, the deprived wife of Dasharath, and Kaikeyi, once the beloved one only to be hated later, both have their stories to tell. The narration captures their story. The narrator has carefully depicted the emotional crisis that Lakshman goes through. The commonly perceived idea of his unquestionable and complete devotion to Ram is subtly subverted in the narration.

In *Sita's Sister*, Lakshman appears to be the dutiful brother to Ram as well as the bereaved husband of Urmila. The narratorial point of view displaces Lakshman from the peripheral existence he had in Ram and Sita's life in exile and assigns him a central position in Urmila's life. Digression from the prevalent Ramayan narrative also takes place when Sunaina, the queen of Mithila and her relation with her daughters is represented with equal importance to that of Ram and Lakshman's relationship with their respective mothers. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila is at the center of the narration. Her thoughts, feelings, and experiences as the princess in Mithila and as Lakshman's wife in Ayodhya is focalised in the text. The narrator traces her thoughts and interprets her actions. Her emotional conflicts regarding her status in both Mithila and Ayodhya, her mental struggle to accept the injustice done to her by Lakshman, her stoic

acceptance of her situation, and her astute deliverance of duty towards the royal household and the kingdom – all these narrative elements have been empathetically narrated in the text. In *Sita's Sister*, Sita remains as a supporting character to Urmila, and similarly, Ram to Lakshman. This narrative approach transgresses the popular Ramayan narratives in assigning Urmila and Lakshman a foregrounded role.

The element of transgression is common across all the selected texts. In ***Lanka's Princess*** it is reflected through the narratorial point of view that interprets Meenakshi's role in the Ramayan narrative. Like *Sita's Sister*, *Lanka's Princess* is also narrated by a third person. Krishna is the narrator of this text who has complete access to Meenakshi and all the other characters' minds and their thought process. The narrator in *Lanka's Princess* presents Meenakshi's point of view. The narration focuses on the protagonist's perspective, evaluates the narrated events and examines the way the central character perceives those, and manifests her emotional and corporeal experiences in the narrated events. In this text Meenakshi sees and the narrator speaks about what she sees. The point of view highlights Meenakshi's introspection on her life since her childhood. "It was a daughter, not a son, her heart sank, her aspirations drowning in a flood of disappointment and easy tears" (Kane 1). Here the narrator refers to Kaikesi's reaction when Meenakshi is born. Meenakshi is born to an asura mother and brahmin father. Her mother detests the birth of a daughter. She is apprehensive that a daughter would not help her in fulfilling her dream. Her dream is to build an asura empire that would be ruled by her sons across the three worlds. She is fond of her illustrious sons – Ravan, Vibhishan, and Kumbhakarna. Meenakshi, although loved by her father, Vishravas, and her grandmother, Taraka, was deprived of maternal love since birth. She grows up fierce and defensive. The plot depicts that beneath this fierceness, lies Meenakshi's stubborn craving to be loved and accepted.

The point of view focalises Meenakshi's struggle for an independent identity in her family. The narrator focuses on the events and characters in a multidimensional way. The narrative of Ravan and his asura kingdom operates as a backdrop to Meenakshi's personal narrative. Her young adult days, her love for the Kalkeya king, Vidyujiva and their subsequent marriage, the conflict between Vidyujiva and Ravan that caused Vidyujiva's death, her life as a widow in Dandak forest, and finally, her encounter with Ram and Lakshman, all these events shape Meenakshi's life. The narrator refers to different characters and events but those are essentially represented from Meenakshi's viewpoint. Ravan and his brothers are evaluated from her perspective. The conflict between the devas and the asuras are represented as how that impacted her life. Most importantly, Meenakshi asserts an agency in her encounter with Ram that led to the war in Lanka. To avenge Vidyujiva's death, she instigated Ravan to fight Ram knowing that it would lead to his destruction. In this narrative, both Ram and Ravan are peripheral actants who contribute to the main actions that Meenakshi designs. This transgression is significantly highlighted through the point of view in this text.

"Meenakshi", "Shanta", and "Manthara", all the three stories by Neelakantan exhibit figural point of view but are narrated by third person omniscient narrators. In all three texts, the respective protagonist's perspective has been primarily focalised. The narrators' points of view appear secondary to the characters' points of view in these texts. The plot of "Meenakshi" represents an old, disfigured, destitute Meenakshi in Ayodhya. She leads a life of a street dweller. She is without nose and breasts and she is taunted for her physical deformity by the people on the busy streets of Ayodhya. The point of view in this story questions and subverts certain perceptions regarding the representation of her character in the popular Ramayan narratives. Meenakshi narrates her story in course of an interaction with chandali. Like Meenakshi chandali is also a street dweller. She has a family of an abusive husband, a small daughter, and another new born daughter. Meenakshi and chandali mutually share their plight

of living in Ayodhya. Their condition is not in consonance with the notion of the "ideal" kingdom. The ideal kingdom does not seem to accommodate people like Meenakshi and chandali who are considered to be belonging to a lower social stratum. While the interaction with chandali is one medium through which the narration subverts the prevalent idea about Ram's rule in Ayodhya, the other medium of subversion is Meenakshi's memory. Meenakshi relives her traumatic past, her brother, Ravan's defeat, and the destruction of Lanka. She questions the idea of 'good' and 'evil' in connection to Ram and Ravan. She firmly states that her brother, Ravan, lost the war and hence was called evil; Ram became the hero because he won the war. According to her, the idea of 'good' and 'evil' inherently involves a power dynamic, the one who wins exerts the power and the world labels them as 'good'. Thus, the victor is 'good' and the 'vanquished' is evil. Meenakshi's point of view subverts the prevalent notion of Ram being the good and Ravan being the evil in the epic war in Lanka. Later in the plot, Meenakshi and chandali meet Sita. This meeting is another significant narrative element that is focalised in the text. Subverting the popular idea of animosity between Sita and Surpanakha both the characters exhibit a bonding of solidarity. They both have been subjected to injustice and have been forced to accept that and yet, they both have been resilient in their own way. "Meenakshi" reflects Surpanakha's perspective on her life long after she suffered the corporeal wound. The plot narrates a story of her resistance and resilience to accept that she and Ravan were not on the 'wrong' side, rather they were wronged and Meenakshi asserts that idea.

The figural point of view in "**Manthara**" exhibits a reexploration of the prevalent representation of Manthara's story in Ramayan. "Manthara" is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator. However, the narrator narrates what Manthara sees and experiences. Her thoughts, emotions and actions are reinterpreted from her perspective. Manthara, the 'evil', hunchback old woman was a close companion to Kaikeyi in Ayodhya. She is one of the

antagonists in Ram's story because she plotted against him, instigated Kaikeyi to force Dasharath to exile Ram and crown Bharat as the king of Ayodhya. The popular representation of Manthara's character is challenged in this text. The plot focalises on her perception of the events that involved her. Known as the ugliest woman of Kaikeya, when Manthara had accepted her fate to be detested and mocked at, then unexpectedly, her life finds a new purpose. She finds a hope to live a dignified life. She is appointed as the care giver to the infant prince Yudhajit and princess Kaikeyi. Since their first meeting, Manthara and Kaikeyi develop an attachment which deepens with time. "Kaikeyi stared at her, not comprehending. Then with her stubby little fingers she touched Manthara's heart and said, 'This mother. This mother lovely'. Manthara hadn't heard a more beautiful lie in her life" (Neelakantan 84). Kaikeyi, even though she is an infant, is the first person to look beyond Manthara's physical deformity. She loves Manthara unconditionally and Manthara becomes more than a mother to her.

The maternal affection that Manthara feels towards Kaikeyi triggers her urge to protect Kaikeyi's rights in Ayodhya. The act which is predominantly evaluated as evil was actually a mother's attempt to protect her daughter's dignity. Dasharath promised Kaikeyi a boon after she saved his life in the battle against Sambrasura. Further, while marrying Kaikeyi, Dasharath had promised King Ashwapati of Kaikeya that Kaikeyi's son would inherit the throne of Ayodhya. Kaikeyi asks for that boon when she finds Dasharath forgetting his promise and planning for Ram's coronation. She feels her son, Bharat, is deprived. Manthara cannot bear to see the king deceiving her daughter. She protests by supporting Kaikeyi in claiming her boon. However, she has to face a different consequence than Kaikeyi. The latter being a queen is spared the rigorous punishment that Manthara has to endure. The point of view in "Manthara" focalises Manthara's struggle to retain her identity as a mother to a bereaved princess, and her efforts to take care of that princess when she becomes a queen and gets deceived by her

husband. The popular perception about Manthara's character is altered in this narration and it emerges as a story of a mother-daughter duo who fight for their right and dignity.

The plot of "**Shanta**" is also narrated by a third person omniscient narrator, yet it projects a figural point of view. The text is a different interpretation of the popularly known Ramayan story. This interpretation highlights Shanta's perception of the events that impacted her life, and her perspective towards those events. Shanta's denouncement of the royal life, and preference for the ordinary yet, elevated existence can be considered as an element of transgression in the text. She takes refuge in the company of ordinary people to divert herself from the negligence she received from her parents. The text questions the significance of royal heritage and traditions. That the tremendous urge for a male heir might often result in major familial unrest has been highlighted in this text. The text also questions the significance and utility of *Brahma Vidya*. The first meeting of Shanta and Rishyasringa is immensely significant in this regard since it reflects the hollowness of the pursuit of eternal knowledge staking every other joy of life. "What are you going to do after attaining Brahma Vidya, Kumara? What purpose does it serve?" (Neelakantan 48) asked Shanta to Rishyasringa, to which the sage had no answer to deliver. The young hermit was not even sure of the purpose of attaining eternal knowledge. And it is only after he marries Shanta and breaks his celibacy that he realizes that living life in its natural course in itself is a magic, and abstinence is not the only way to lead an elevated life. The figural point of view in the narrative reflects Shanta's journey from an unwanted and deprived princess to a dignified wise woman who had the agency to change her life, and influence lives of others in a significant way.

Amba's story in "**Priestess**" focalises on Amba's struggle to attain justice for the injustice that Bhishma meted out to her. The plot is narrated from a figural point of view that reflects Amba's agony and helpless angst that she endured to avenge herself. In dominant

tellings of Mahabharat, she fails in her attempt in her lifetime. She avenges the wrong done to her, in her next birth being born as Shikhandini. Komarraju alters this part of the story. He ends the story, "Priestess" with Amba giving birth to a daughter. That daughter is Shikhandini. The narration transgresses the predominant Mahabharat story. Shikhandini is portrayed not as her reincarnation, but as her daughter who would avenge her mother's suffering. This is the focal point of the story. Amba vowed to destroy Bhishma. She challenged Bhishma and his oath to celibacy. In this text, she questions his prowess and valour, and affirms that true valour lies in accepting a princess for marriage after abducting her from her *swayamvar*. The third person narrator in the text, traces Amba's emotional trauma and her constant efforts to seek revenge. "Priestess" is a story of a princess who transforms into a priestess through rigorous abstinence not to attain peace and salvation, but rather, to avenge the excruciating pain she was subjected to without any fault of hers.

Amba is also the protagonist of Madhavan's ***The One Who Had Two Lives***. The plot is narrated in first person narration and exhibits a figural point of view. In the first part of the narrative, Amba narrates her story. The first part ends with her death to be followed by the second part in which Shikhandini narrates her tale. The first person narratorial mode emerges ideal for the display of the figural point of view since the protagonists themselves narrate their story. Amba's story is inherently a story of injustice and revenge. However, in this tale, the focalisation reflects a subtle comparison between Bheeshma and Salva. Further, an intricate bonding between Amba and Bheeshma has also been focalised. Vichitravirya, the prince of Hastinapur for whom Amba and her sisters, Ambika and Ambalika were abducted, does not find any major space in the narrative.

The plot revolves around Amba and her relationship with the people in her life. Madhavan includes another character named Lalita in the text. Lalita is a eunuch attendant who

becomes an inseparable companion to Amba. They are together till Amba dies and Lalita is the sole witness to the emotional torment Amba goes through. Amba and Lalita develop a deep bonding of friendship. The unbridgeable gap between their social status does not become a deterrent to their relationship. It is a relationship of trust, love, and most importantly, of understanding. The plot of *The One Who Had Two Lives* demonstrates Amba's perspective on the royal life, the chauvinism that royal men have, and the bindings of responsibility they have that constrain them from leading a humane life. Amba questions the hollowness of the glory that is inherent in the life of royalty. However, the plot primarily focalises the lack of agency a woman has in making decisions for herself. The plot narrates Amba's quest for that agency and to attain justice for herself.

The One Who Swam with the Fishes is the other text by Madhavan selected for this research. Satyavati is the protagonist of this text. However, the plot narrates the story of Matsyagandhi, the name by which Satyavati was known before she became the queen of Hastinapur. Matsyagandhi, the protagonist, narrates her story in first person narration and the narration essentially displays a figural point of view. The narration focuses on Matsyagandhi's life before she attained a royal status. She is the adopted daughter of the fisherman-chieftain Dasharaj. Originally, she is the daughter of King Vasu of Chedi and an *apsara* called Adrika. Adrika was cursed to be a fish. Matsyagandhi was born as a twin with a brother. The king accepted the son but rejected the daughter who was reared by Dasharaj in his family. Matsyagandhi was aware of her original identity. Both Dasharaj and she were determined to restore her royal status. Since her biological father would not accept her, they planned to get her married to a king. King Shantanu of Hastinapur was visiting their area with his entourage of the royal army and Matsyagandhi made a desperate attempt to make herself visible to the king. The young and beautiful fisher girl successfully charmed the king and eventually made her way to the royal family of Hastinapur.

The plot of *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* is narrated by the protagonist, Matsyagandhi and the figural point of view operates in capturing her intricate and intriguing thought process. She does not appear as a naïve young girl in a pitiable condition. She perceives her situation, evaluates it and attempts to transcend that. The dominant tellings of Mahabharat depict Satyavati as the one who disinherited Bhishma from the throne that rightfully belonged to him. This text represents Matsyagandhi's perspective on her life. She is also someone who was deprived of her rights. Born as a princess she was forced to live a life of a downtrodden fisher-girl. Matsyagandhi refuses to accept that. She aspires to create a position for herself that she should have naturally inherited as her birth right. The point of view of this text focalises this aspiration. It manifests a fierce quest for identity of a deprived yet resolute young girl.

The ambition and aspiration of Satyavati is also the focus of Kane's ***The Fisher Queen's Dynasty***. The plot of this text narrates the story of Satyavati's transformation from a poor fisher-girl named Kali (the one with dark complexion) to Satyavati, the ravishing queen of Hastinapur. The narration in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* challenges and disrupts the predominant perceptions about Satyavati's character. Episodes of Mahabharat that include her character have been interpreted from Satyavati's perspective. A third person narrator narrates her story from a narratorial point of view. The text becomes highly contemporary, as it addresses the issues regarding oppression of the downtrodden, and the negligence and deprivation that they encounter at every step. And Satyavati emerges as their representative, who refuses to accept the social norms, refuses to submit to her fate, and also refuses to give up in her struggle for existence. The text is a critical commentary on patriarchal norms, and massive transgression functions in the text in regard to this. Both Parashar and Shantanu desired Kali physically. Hence, Kali too did not find it wrong in demanding what she wanted of them. Parashar transformed her from matsyagandhi to yojanagandhi, freeing her from the fish odour, gifted her with eternal youth, and most importantly, her first born, Vyasa, the renowned sage.

And from this child, the Kuru dynasty progressed, since Dhritarashtra and Pandu, both the Kuru princes were Vyasa's sons, from the side of Satyavati, and not from the royal lineage of Shantanu. Thus, the Kuru dynasty became the fisher queen's dynasty. A narrative fact well known, but seldom pondered upon. The text repeatedly questions the grand epic, in every possible way. It represents a completely different image of Satyavati, that always existed but has been seldom noticed.

Point of view is a crucial narratological component in the context of mythic narratives as it contributes to the understanding of the perspective from which a character is approached and reexplored. Point of view is also significant because through this narratological element, a character's perspective towards their surroundings can also be comprehended. The other two narratological components that contribute to the understanding of the selected texts are – temporality and spatiality.

3.4 Temporality and textual analysis

In narratology, temporality refers to the representation of time in the story and the plot. The distinction between the story time and plot time (narrative time) was introduced by the German theoreticians. Following them, Genette worked on this concept in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Methods*. The temporal order of narrative events in story time is always chronological. However, that chronological order often gets disrupted in the plot. Hence there is a difference between the story time and the narrative time. Genette calls these disruptions 'anachronies'. Anachronies are commonly found in fictional narratives because the story time often gets distorted in the narrative time. He further refers to analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flash forward) and suggests that these analepses and prolepses reflect the anachronies in a narrative. The use of analepses is seen more often in narratives, that prolepses. Jose Angel Garcia Landa further works on Genette's theory and suggests that the story time is

pluridimensional. “Fabula time is pluridimensional, since a fabula is not a thin narrative line but a volume of relationships progressing together” (Garcia Landa, ch.3). According to him, multiple events can happen at the same time at the story level, it is at the plot level that events are presented in succession, although ‘in succession’ does not essentially mean it has to be presented in a chronological manner. In this research the aspect of temporality is analysed to understand the narrativity of the selected texts, and to examine how the aspect of temporality contributes to the generation of meaning in a respective text.

The texts selected for the present research exhibit different types of temporal arrangement of plots. ***Sita’s Sister*** has a linear plot time. In this text, Urmila’s narrative journey has happened in a chronological manner. However, in both of her other texts, ***The Fisher Queen’s Dynasty***, and ***Lanka’s Princess***, Kane presents a disruption in the temporal order of narration as the main texts display analeptic narration, i.e. the main texts represent narration in flash back. *The Fisher Queen’s Dynasty* begins with a prologue narrated by Bhishma when he is at his death bed at Kurukshetra. In the prologue, he recapitulates his life and repents the decisions he made that led to the war, and holds Satyavati responsible for everything that he did. Following this prologue, the text begins with the story of Bhishma’s birth in the first chapter, “The Birth”. The following chapter, “Fisher Girl” marks the beginning of Satyavati’s story from the point in time when she meets Parashar. From that point, the plot has a linear progression. However, minor distortion of subjective time is noticed when Satyavati recalls the history of her birth. Garcia Landa refers to this as the ‘subjective time’. “Subjective time is the representation of time in the minds of the characters in the fabula” (Garcia Landa ch.3). Hence, when Satyavati recalls the history of her birth, the subjective time is distorted for that particular narrative event. This distortion happens at the micro level. At the macro level, the plot has a linear progression. Similarly, in *Lanka’s Princess*, the story time is distorted at the plot level. The novel begins with a prologue. In third person narration, the prologue narrates

the story of Kubja, a reincarnation of Surpanakha. Kubja meets Krishna in Mathura and Krishna narrates her the story of her previous birth. Therefore, the main text displays analepsis similar to *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. However, Kane also employs the technique of prolepsis in this text. The novel ends with an epilogue which presents Krishna foreseeing a subsequent birth of Surpanakha, "Krishna smiled and in his smile he could see a certain future, one which the unsuspecting woman beside him could not see but who would have to live it one more" (Kane 297). The epilogue displays a flash forward of the story time and represents Surpankha's tale in a later birth.

"**Shanta**", and "**Manthara**" display a linear plot time with the chronological progression of the plots. In "**Meenakshi**", Surpanakha recalls her past in course of conversation with chandali. This particular narrative event displays distortion of the subjective time as Meenakshi's thoughts travel backwards in time. Apart from this singular disruption of subjective time at the micro level, at the macro level the story has a linear, chronological progression.

Madhavan's texts, ***The One Who Swam with the Fishes*** and ***The One Who Had Two Lives***, both display anachronies. In *The One Who Swam with the Fishes*, the narration oscillates between the past and the present. The recollection of the past displays analeptic narration. Therefore, the plot time does not have a chronological progression. In *The One Who Had Two Lives*, the narrated portion in between Part One and Part Two, i.e. the narration that takes place between Amba's tale and Shikhandini's tale, display analepsis. It displays a dialogue between Amba and Lalita that presents first person narration by both of them. In that part, Amba's subjective time is disrupted with constant thoughts about Bheeshma and the injustice she was subjected to. Lalita recollects her birth as a boy and her earlier life through analepsis. As already

mentioned, this narrative space comprises the kernel of the story and traces the deepest emotions of both Amba and Lalita.

Komarraju's "**Priestess**" also displays a disruption of linear temporality. The text begins with a prologue narrated by Ganga in first person narration. Ganga introduces Amba's tale and states that Amba's tale is one of the key factors that led to the war of Kurukshetra. Following the prologue, Amba's story begins followed by Kunti and Gandhari's stories. Therefore, the stories of Amba, Kunti, and Gandhari are narrated in analepsis. Further, Amba's story, "Priestess" also displays distortion of story time in the plot time. The story begins with Amba visiting Salva after returning from Hastinapur. The narrative event of her abduction by Bhishma and the subsequent events are narrated in flashback. Moreso, the narration keeps oscillating between a third person narration by an omniscient narrator and a first person narration by Amba. Thus, the narrative voice also keeps altering that exhibits a disruption in the plot time.

Chronologically linear plot arrangement is often distorted in fictional narratives. The narrative time disrupts the story time that reflects the causality of a narrative events in such narratives. The disruption of story time in the narrative time primarily displays the hierarchy of narrative events and imparts more significance to certain narrative events that perform the cardinal functions in a text. Therefore, an understanding of temporality contributes to the comprehension of a narrative in an effective manner.

3.5 Spatiality and textual analysis

Spatiality or spatialization, as a narrotological component for studying literary texts, is a recent inclusion in the domain of narratology. However, compared to 'temporality', the concept of spatiality has not been explored extensively in analysing literary texts. Gabriel Zoran, one of the key theorists on spatiality in literary narratives, states that, "The existence of

space is pushed into a corner so to speak. It is not altogether discarded, but neither does it have a recognized and clear-cut status within the text" (Zoran 310). Zoran postulates that the spatiality, as a narrative component has not been explored as temporality has been. However, in the postclassical phase of research on narratology, spatiality is emerging as a noteworthy component to study literary narratives. Moreso, in the context of studying Indian texts, spatiality plays a significant role. The theory of Indian narratology exhibits a contrary idea to the Western school of thought in this regard. Often temporality seems to be a fluid concept, and space has definite mention in Indian texts. Especially in the context of studying mythic narratives, places cited in the Indian epics like – Hastinapur, Ayodhya, Mithila, Kurukshetra, or other topographical entities like the rivers, Ganga and Yamuna, play a definite and crucial role in the unfolding of the plots. Hence, an analysis of 'space' as a component, has relevance in analysing the selected mythic narratives to gather further understanding of the texts.

Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu have approached the concept of spatiality intersecting with literary narratives in their book, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet*. 'Space' or a geographical locale traditionally functions as the background of a plot. Contradicting this traditional perception about the role of spatiality in narratives, Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu state that 'space' has other significant roles to play as a narratological component. "It can be a focus of attention, a bearer of symbolic meaning, an object of emotional investment, a means of strategic planning, a principle of organization, and even a supporting medium" (Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu 1). The texts selected for the present research exhibit that spatiality plays a substantial role in the understanding of emotions of the characters and significance of the narrative events.

In ***Sita's Sister***, both Mithila and Ayodhya have conspicuous narrative roles to play. Both the topographical locales witness Urmila's quest for an independent identity. In Mithila

her identity remains subsidiary to the status of Sita as a princess; similarly, in Ayodhya Sita gets the position of the eldest daughter-in-law in the royal household. Nevertheless, Urmila exceeds her subsidiary and almost marginal position, in Ayodhya. Ayodhya appears to be the space where she emerges as an independent character and creates an individual identity for herself in the absence of Ram, Lakshman, and Sita. Ayodhya also plays a crucial role in understanding Surpanakha's position in "**Meenakshi**". In this text, both Ayodhya and Lanka have metaphorical significance. Her character is located in Ayodhya where she leads a deplorable life of a street dweller. Lanka as a spatial entity remains an object of emotional attachment. In "Meenakshi", a stark contrast of Ayodhya and Lanka is presented that is parallel to the contrast between Ram and Ravan. Further, this contrast questions the dichotomy between good and evil and presents an altered perspective.

Similar to "Meenakshi", the metaphorical contrast between Ayodhya and Kaikeya also plays a crucial narrative role in "**Manthara**". The identity of being Kaikeyi's foster mother that Manthara attains in Kaikeya, the identity that gave a purpose to her life, gets relegated in Ayodhya. In Ayodhya she is identified as a scheming, evil maid of Kaikeyi who is instrumental in disinheriting Ram from ascending the throne of Ayodhya. While fighting for her foster daughter's rights in Ayodhya, Manthara reminisces Kaikeya as a place she identifies as her own. She completely loses her dignity and freedom when she remains imprisoned in Ayodhya. Ayodhya literally and metaphorically emerges to be a place where Manthara suffers subjugation and abandonment. Another figurative contrast between Ayodhya and Anga is found in "**Shanta**". Shanta, the princess deprived of familial love and rightful inheritance of the throne of Ayodhya becomes the beloved adopted daughter in Anga. She emerges to be a saviour to the people of Anga as she plays an instrumental role in bringing rain in the drought affected kingdom and in return gets the status of a princess and receives familial love. Hence, Anga represents bliss and love in contradiction to Ayodhya that stands as a space of rejection

and deprivation. Hastinapur is another key topographical entity in the context of the Interpretations that represent Amba and Satyavati. In both, "**Priestess**", and ***The One Who Had Two Lives***, Hastinapur emerges as the place where Amba faces Bhishma's rejection and the course of her life changes forever. In ***The Fisher Queen's Dynasty***, and ***The One Who Swam with the Fishes***, Hastinapur symbolises an object of desire, an object Satyavati desperately wants to achieve to fulfil her ambition.

In this chapter, the selected texts have been analysed on the basis of narratological components like – story and plot, point of view, temporality, and spatiality. These components significantly contribute to the understanding of the characterization of the protagonists in the primary texts. Interpretations of the characters are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Beyond the Frame of Reference: An Analysis of Referential Characters

4.1 Overview

'Character' emerges as a vital narrative device in the context of the present research as this research centers around interpretations and representations of often unheard or less explored mythical characters from Ramayan and Mahabharat. Character is a text-based entity in a narrative, usually anthropomorphic in nature. The term 'character' is a major narratological component. It is one of the primary narrative devices that is essential in pursuing a narratological analysis of a fictional text.

The present study aims to analyse how this representation takes place in selected contemporary mythic fiction. "Narrative – fiction as well as journalism, film, and informal narratives of everyday life – thrives on the affective appeal of characters" (Bal 104). Engagement with a narrative depends to a large extent on its characters. Readers might like or dislike a character, but it is the most effective device through which the narrative content of any text is manifested. In the context of fiction, a character is an imagined entity, "The people with whom literature is concerned are not real people. They are fabricated creatures made up from fantasy, imitation, memory" (Bal 105). Readers engage with these imaginary figures and these figures become the medium through which they connect to a fictional text. The present research examines contemporary interpretations of Indian epics with a focus on selected characters. The primary objective of this chapter is to analyse, from the perspective of narratology, how the reimagination of these characters takes place in the selected texts. The narratological analysis is based on Mieke Bal's theory of resistant characters, and the actantial model developed by A.J. Greimas. The representation of the mythical characters who are being examined in this chapter are – Urmila, Shanta, Surpanakha, Manthara, Satyavati, and Amba.

The key argument of the thesis is presented in this chapter. The chapter looks into how the characterization of the selected characters contributes to a different understanding of Ramayan and Mahabharat.

4.2 The 'resistant' characters

Characters in fictional narratives are not real human beings. They do not possess any human qualities by themselves, they are assigned those qualities by the author. Their personality, psyche, and ideology are attributed to them according to their role in a respective text. According to Bal, readers connect to a fictional narrative through the psychological description and manifestation of the ideology of the characters. "Character is intuitively the most crucial category of narrative, and also the one most subject to projection and fallacies" (Bal 105). In her analysis on characters, Bal refers to an idea called character-effect. She suggests that character-effect happens when readers almost fail to distinguish between human beings and imagined characters due to a strong resemblance between the two entities. Character-effect emerges to be a significant narrative factor that determines the impact a character has on the readers. It is because of the character-effects that the readers identify with certain characters and their emotions which result in a further connection with the entire narrative. "This is a major attraction of a narrative" (Bal 105). Bal further postulates that character-effect becomes more effective if the readers face resistance from the characters. "Characters give the most pleasure when they are allowed to resist their readers instead of being overruled and forced to conform to readers' expectations" (Bal 106). Bal's idea of resistant characters happens to be a significant component of the theoretical framework of the present research. This research essentially concentrates on resistant characters in contemporary interpretations of the Indian epics. The characters selected for the study are all resistant in the way they are portrayed in the respective texts.

Bal further explains how this resistance occurs. She suggests that the notion of resistant characters can be aptly applicable in the context of historical and mythical narratives. Readers are acquainted with the characters of historical or mythical stories. Same applies to folktales. In historical, mythical, and folk narratives, the characters are generally well known. Bal opines that readers have some prior knowledge about these characters and the context of their respective textual presence. She refers to this knowledge as an extra-textual factor. Which means, apart from a particular text that a reader reads, their prior knowledge about the characters of that text impacts their reading. And when a character resists or challenges that prior, and often conventional knowledge, they become a resistant character. They confront their prevalent image. The portrayal of the characters – Satyavati, Amba, Urmila, Surpanakha, Manthara, Shanta, in the texts selected for the present research, confront and challenge their dominant representations. Bal suggests that the presence of resistant characters contributes to understanding an old text from a fresh, novel perspective. This idea of resistant characters becomes a core theoretical element to study the texts selected for this research. The re-presentations of the protagonists of the primary texts tend to alter the traditional perceptions of these characters. Hence the texts look new, and the characters draw readers' attention. These characters challenge the prior information the readers have about them and engage the readers to understand the epics from a new direction.

'Predictability' is another important aspect that Bal introduces to conceptualize resistant characters. She suggests that historical or legendary characters are often predictable. The readers already have an image of these characters in their mind which influences the predictability. The same applies to mythological characters as well. The readers process the prior information and spontaneously relate it to the image of these kind of characters without giving it a conscious thought. The readers already have a fixated idea about these characters. Bal calls this process of fixation 'determination'.

The concept of determination suggests that the readers have a determined notion about certain characters in their mind. Readers' acquaintance with a character is reflected in the determination. "Even if we do not wish to study the relations between text and context as a separate object of analysis, we cannot ignore the fact that direct and indirect knowledge of the context of certain characters contributes significantly to their meaning" (Bal 108). A study of mythological characters essentially includes this notion as these characters are often known and understood in connection to the indirect, deep-rooted knowledge that exists about them. In addition to that, this longstanding existing knowledge evocatively contributes towards perceiving these characters in a text. Bal identifies, the context of a text and the indirect knowledge about a character, as 'extra-textual situation' (Bal 108). She further introduces the concept of 'frame of reference' (Bal 108). Frame of reference is the indirect knowledge about a character that might exist outside a particular text. It refers to the lack of information about a character in a text that the readers are otherwise acquainted with. The characters who have a frame of reference are known as referential characters. Bal cites the instances of historical and legendary characters to explain the idea of referential characters as the identity of such characters are largely determined in extra-textual situations. Mythological characters also belong to the same category of referential characters as they too often have a stereotypical representation and appear with a frame of reference to a reader's mind. "If presented in opposition to the referential characteristics, however, such characters can be a powerful trigger of surprise, suspense, or humour" (Bal 109). Bal postulates that the more a character breaks their frame of reference the more they become unrecognizable. This creates a disruption to their stereotypical image and often makes them an interesting narrative component. Bal's theory on characters is pertinent to the present research as this research aims to analyse mythic fictions which focus on breaking the frame of reference of certain mythic characters. The present research examines how the selected characters confront the expectations that has been

generated by their popular, and often stereotypical representations. It aims to study the narrative components which contribute to a different portrayal of these characters in the respective texts.

4.3 Actants and actantial models

Bal further extends her study that includes an analysis of the narrative component, 'actor'. The concept of actors, in narratology, is understood in relation to the functions that a character performs. On the basis of the actions, characters are categorized in actantial model. Bal's analysis of actors is based on the actantial model developed by A.J. Greimas. Greimas drew inspiration from the actantial model formulated by the Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp. Propp's theory on narrative actants offers an understanding of the genealogy of the concept of actantial model. In *Morphology,* Propp has presented his analysis of the elements present in a narrative. It can be referred to as a taxonomical model that categorises the 'constant' and 'variable' components of fairy tales. However, it has not remained limited to the use of analysing folk tales or fairy tales alone, rather, it has become one of the most significant contribution in examining varied kinds of narratives, like, literature, film, television series, theatre, cartoon strips, advertisements, dance forms, film theory, news reports, story generation and interactive drama systems and so on (Dogra 411). Folklorists, literary critics and theoreticians, linguists, anthropologists, structuralists have often referred to the Proppian taxonomical model to demonstrate the different levels of narrative techniques. The theory of narratology, owing to its domineering influence of structuralism, has made extensive use of Propp's theory. The thirty-one functions of narrative elements that he has suggested in *Morphology* have served as a fundamental basis of an understanding of the structure of any narrative.

Propp analysed the 'constants' and the 'variables' of folk narratives to show how the structure overall leads to the manifestation of an underlying meaning. He examined of Russian

fairy tales in order to identify common themes within them and broke down the tales into thirty-one 'functions' that formed the structure of many of those tales. In *Morphology*, Propp explains the term 'functions' as, "Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action… Function of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale" (Propp 21). By comparing four major events depicted in folktales, Propp suggests that the functions of the 'dramatis personae' constitute the fundamental elements of a tale. **What** a dramatis personae does is constant, **how** and **who** does it might vary according to the content. The other important aspect Propp has focussed on is the sequence of how the functions occur in a tale. He proposes that the functions of the characters and the sequence of their occurrence are the core elements of any tale. Greimas, in his theory on actantial model, offers a revision to Propp's idea of functions of a character in a narrative.

Although Propp's theory on characters and the functions they execute was a principal inspiration for Greimas' theory, yet Greimas postulated significant revision to Propp's idea. Propp's theory includes seven types of characters who perform thirty-one types of functions. These seven types of characters are – the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought-for person, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero (Greimas 201). Greimas' actants are not essentially anthropomorphic entities. These actants can also be an object or an abstract component, for instance, an idea or an emotion. The term 'actant' refers to the different structural roles that are an integral part of fictional narrative. Greimas focuses more on the actants rather than on the characters in a narrative. Apart from Propp's structural analysis of folktales, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory on structural linguistics has been a major influence to Greimas' concept of actantial model. "From Saussure, Greimas adopts a linguistic metaphor, which is at the heart of his theory. Literature is a language, and the individual narrative is a sentence for Greimas" (Duvall 192). Modelled on Saussure's concept of *langue* and *parole*, Greimas postulates that

literature is *langue* and individual narrative is the *parole* which manifests the *langue* (Duvall 192). The concept of actantial analysis posited by Greimas seeks to examine the narrative entities that perform an action in a text. In this context, the idea of 'narrative entities' does not strictly refer to characters. The notion of narrative entities includes any narrative component present in a text that has significance in the plot development. Hence, any object, event, action, emotional state, physical feature that bears significance in the text, can be identified as an actant. The concept of actantial model, thus, deviates from the conventional approach towards character analysis as the study is not confined to examining only human agents in a narrative. The present research aims to apply this pivotal tenet of Greimas' theory of actantial analysis. This tenet becomes relevant in the context of this research because the narrative agents that play a major role in the selected primary texts are not always human beings. Further, an analysis of the axes of desire of Greimas' actantial model will further help in understanding the significance of applicability of the model in the current study.

According to Greimas, every narrative comprises of three axes and six actants. The actantial roles of these six actants are paired in binary oppositions, two on each axis. The three axes are – "axis of desire, axis of communication, and axis of conflict" (Duvall 192). Greimas refers to each axis as 'actantial category' (Greimas 203). The six actants are Subject vs Object, Sender vs Receiver, and Helper vs Opponent. The actants, Subject vs Object, functioning in binary opposition belong to the actantial category of desire. Similarly, Sender vs Receiver belong to the actantial category of communication, and Helper vs Opponent belong to the category of conflict. Greimas suggests that the actants are determined by the semantic roles that narrative agents play in a text. According to Greimas, the actantial category of desire that involves the actants Subject vs Object, is at the centre of any fictional narrative. The present research selects two actantial categories (axes) to analyse the characters and their narrative roles in the selected primary texts. The selected axes are - the axis of desire and the axis of

conflict. Therefore, the actants selected for application are Subject vs Object and Helper vs Opponent respectively. The rationale behind adopting Greimas' theory of actantial analysis is to understand the characterization of the protagonists in the selected texts. This research identifies each protagonist as the Subject of the respective text and aims to examine their journey towards attaining the Object. However, the 'objects', are essentially not human characters. For characters like Urmila and Shanta 'identity' is the Object. The interpretations of their stories trace their journey towards establishing an individual identity for themselves. Manthara seeks 'acceptance'. Surpanakha, in *Lanka's Princess*, seeks 'revenge' and 'redemption'; and in "Meenakshi" craves for a life of 'dignity'. Satyavati's ambition is to attain 'justice' and a royal identity. And Amba seeks 'revenge'. The present research aims to understand how the primary texts narrate the stories of these characters' individual journey and their success and failure in attaining their respective Objects.

4.4 Analysis of the selected characters

In the realm of mythic narratives, contemporary revisionist mythopoeia challenges the representational hierarchy of characters by implementing a shifted perspective. Kane's ***Sita's Sister*** is one such revisionist text that highlights a character who has remained unheard in the domain of Ramayan narrative. Urmila's identity remains narrowed to that of Sita's sister and Lakshman's wife. She has been assigned a minor narrative space. Kane breaks away from this conventional approach of Urmila's representation and challenges the frame of reference that popularly exists. "It is important to understand the course of events from Urmila's perspective so as to trace her emergence from the margins to the centre-stage" (Beena 149).

In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila emerges as a strong, individualistic character. There is a paradox that pervades the text. On one hand she appears to be a resolute, brave and upright woman who is cognizant of her surroundings; on the other, she constantly strives for her identity. 'Identity'

becomes the Object in this text that the Subject, Urmila pursues. Although she gracefully accepts her parents' preferential treatment towards Sita, yet she never unconditionally submits to her subordinate status. Her character gives the impression befitting of a princess who is in command of every situation that she is into. Kane interprets the narrative of Ramayan to emphasize Urmila's position in the narrative and creates narrative events that highlight her presence. Urmila is the guiding figure to the four sisters, she has a significant role to play in Ram and Sita's marriage, she rescues Lakshman from the deadly wrath of sage Parashuram, she makes efforts to keep the bonding between the sisters intact after their marriage, and most importantly, she assumes the role of a guardian to protect the royal family when it falls apart after Ram left for the exile.

Urmila's identity prevails as a dominant narrative agent throughout the text. "Sita was Maithili, the princess of Mithila, when it was Urmila who should have been crowned with that. But never had Sita seen Urmila resentful about all the favours showed upon her, when she was deprived of them" (Kane 23). Urmila's character becomes the medium through which a fundamental question is raised regarding the identity of Sita and Urmila. The above excerpt from the text is a narrative tool that challenges Sita's identity as Maithili, the identity that is deeply rooted in the domain of the Ramayan narrative and also in the cultural history associated with the epic. Urmila's identity of being the actual 'Maithili' is focused on in this text. The question related to Urmila's identity creates a difference between hers and Sita's status in Ayodhya too, although from a different perspective. Kaikeyi offers Sita a cold reception when she arrives at Ayodhya as a newlywed bride. Kaikeyi believes that because she is a foundling and not the biological child to King Seeradhwaj, the Janak of Mithila, Sita does not deserve to marry a prince. She explicitly favours Urmila over Sita. Lakshman later confirms this to Urmila, "Again, knowing Ma Kaikeyi, she is dismissive about Sita because she is an orphan, not the true princess of Mithila, like you are" (Kane 99). The storyworld of the text is infused

with such narrative devices that continuously question the validity of Sita's identity as the princess of Mithila and explicitly assign importance to Urmila.

At every step of her life, Urmila has been subjected to a secondary position. She is not considered as the first choice to look after the family and state affairs when Ram leaves for the exile. Ram explicitly chooses Lakshman and Sita for looking after the family, "You and Sita have to look after the family when I am not here. They need you more. Your place is in the palace, not in the forest. It is my punishment which I have to bear alone" (Kane 141). Ram's words overtly display his preference. He chooses Sita to assist Lakshman in managing the household affairs, and not Urmila. Further, and most importantly, Lakshman totally refutes Urmila's feelings and opinions while deciding to accompany Ram to the exile. Lakshman's decision-making does not include her and this raises a question about the lack of significance of her identity as his wife and as a daughter-in-law of the Raghu dynasty. "Lakshman had forsaken her and Sita was going to leave the palace with Ram. The two persons whom she loved most had left her, without a moment's hesitation" (Kane 142). However, this cannot deter her from asserting her agency. She faces the deprivation and deals with it in a dignified manner. The focal point of *Sita's Sister* is Urmila's resilience, and not her pitiable situation.

Not only resilience, Urmila also exhibits a resistance towards her situation. She accompanies Bharat along with the queen mothers to Dandaka forest to convince Ram to return to Ayodhya and ascend the throne. There, in the presence of the entire royal family and revered sages, Bharat announces his decision that he will rule the kingdom on Ram's behalf, until Ram returns. However, he himself would live a life of an ascetic in Nandigram, at the outskirts of Ayodhya and Ram's sandals will be placed on the throne to signify Ram's presence. Just as Lakshman did not consider it important to consult Urmila while making his decision to leave her, Bharat too does not consider the pain of separation that Mandavi has to bear as he would henceforth lead a life of austerity. Urmila voices her protest at this point, "Today, in this room,

we have talked about all sorts of dharma – of the father and the sons, of the king and princes, of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, even of the wife for the husband. But is there no dharma of the husband for his wife? No dharma of the son for his mother? Is it always about the fathers, sons and brothers? (Kane 219). The sages present in that room consider Urmila's question blasphemous. As they resist her, she asserts her identity and reiterates the question, "I, as the daughter-in-law of the famous Raghu dynasty of the Ikshvaaku race – and not merely as the daughter of King Janak – ask a very simple question. What is the dharma of the man for his wife, the dharma of a man for his mother? Please give me an answer" (Kane 222).

Urmila, further criticizes Ram and his brothers and demands an answer for the negligence they have shown towards their wives, "If you could not keep the vows you made to your wives, why did you brothers marry? You may be the best of the princes, the perfect sons, the ideal brothers, probably the ideal king too, but never the good husband!" (Kane 223). It is clear that Urmila's words subvert the dominant perception about the image of an epic hero. Urmila's thoughts raise questions about the dharma of an ideal man. Further, in the context of an epic, she questions the narrative elements that are conventionally emphasized in an epic. While the characters of Sage Kashyap and the other sages attempt to uphold the qualities of an 'ideal' prince, Urmila demands the ideal princes to emerge as ideal husbands as well. This aspect of personal relationship between a husband and a wife does not seem vital unless it has a political or religious angle associated with it within the narrative scope of an epic. Urmila brings this issue to the fore and raises a debate. She strongly advocates that the duty of a husband towards his wife is also an aspect of his dharma. Urmila's opinions explicitly imply that performing the duties of marital life are as important as defeating enemies in a battlefield. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila does not fight to assert only her individual identity, rather she emerges as a representative of female epic characters whose tale of pain and suffering often goes unheard. Hence, Urmila's character in this text transgresses the dominant perception of her

being an obedient and demure wife of Lakshman. The plot narrates the story of an unsung heroine of Ramayan who appears in the narrative space of this text to reclaim her identity.

The diversity and plurality of the Indian epics have always accommodated novel elements to merge with the discourse. According to Devdutt Pattanaik, Shanta's character is one such inclusion. However, in spite of the inclusion, this character happens to be one of the most unheard and peripheral ones. In "Shanta", Neelakantan has incorporated a novel perspective in approaching the timeless epic through **Shanta's** story. Apart from Shanta, the characterisations of Kaikeyi and Manthara also exhibit a radical shift in perspective. These two characters essentially occupy a relegated position and are generally perceived as negative characters. In this text, Neelakantan exploits Manthara and Kaikeyi's plotting against Ram as an act of avenging the wrong that has been meted out towards Shanta who was deprived of her rightful inheritance to the throne of Ayodhya.

Shanta, in this text, has been portrayed as a victim of the socio-cultural malice of the preference of a son over a daughter. Dasharath is unhappy with a daughter and does not agree to Shanta inheriting his throne. On the contrary, Kaikeyi, Shanta's stepmother, firmly asserts Shanta's right to the throne. She explicitly opposes the need for a male heir since Dasharath already has a daughter to ascend the throne. Kaikeyi motivates Shanta to be trained in state affairs and martial arts. It was primarily under Kaikeyi's influence that Shanta initiates to conduct informal court sessions for the people of Ayodhya to whom she delivers justice with love and sincerity. However, Dasharath never approved of this idea that Shanta could be his heir. The more Shanta craves for filial love the more Dasharath makes her realise that she is unworthy and unwanted. Subsequently she is adopted by the king of Anga. When the kingdom of Anga is suffering from drought, she agrees to marry Rishyasringa who could bring rain to the parched land. This act of hers in the interest of the kingdom brings her love and affection from the people of Anga. Shanta's life after her marriage is blissful and fulfilling. Rishyasringa

emerges to be an understanding and loving husband. She finally receives the familial love that she craved for, which she never received from Dasharath and Kaushalya. Denouncing the life of worldly comfort, Shanta and Rishyasringa happily embrace the pursuit of spirituality and Shanta engages herself in serving the needy which she always wanted to do.

The choice of foregrounded characters plays the most significant role in this text. Neelakantan brings Shanta's character to the fore and challenges a pivotal textual element of Ramayan which is related to the presence of Dasharath's sons. Kaikeyi and Manthara are the tools of subverting male dominance, and Shanta becomes the medium of it. Kaikeyi explicitly highlights that Ayodhya does not need a male heir while a princess is already there. She scornfully condemns Dasharath for giving away Shanta in adoption to a different kingdom. She urges Shanta to defy her father's instructions and to refuse to leave Ayodhya, "Tell your father that you do not want to be adopted. You are heir to the Ikshvaku vamsa. The throne belongs to you" (Neelakantan 31). Kaikeyi fiercely attempts to resist the injustice that was being done to Shanta. She goes to the extent of offering to adopt Shanta to keep her in Ayodhya, '"Shanta, just say once that you don't want to go and you shall stay here, in this palace as my daughter,' Kaikeyi moved forward, glaring at her husband" (Neelakantan 31). The fierce, independent, free-spirited Kaikeyi is a revelation in the text. Her characterisation alters her infamous image that exists in the context of Ramayan.

Manthara appears in this text as an indomitable rebellious woman. While Kaikeyi still reluctantly accepts Shanta's departure from Ayodhya, Manthara refuses to do so. She vows, going against Shanta's will, to avenge the injustice done to Shanta. Neelakantan exploits Manthara's plotting against Ram as a trope to avenge the injustice. Manthara's plotting, executed through Kaikeyi is one of the major narrative turning points in "Shanta". Neelakantan alters the perception that is prevalent regarding Kaikeyi and Manthara's role in Ramayan. In his text, it is not a wrong doing on Manthara's part, rather it is a step taken towards amending

a wrong that has been done to Shanta by Dasharath. “I will make him pay for it” (Neelakantan 34), vows Manthara. She promises to Shanta that she would make Dasharath repent for choosing a son over his daughter. “He would regret choosing a son over you. I only pray that gods make me the girdle that serves him the deserving dish. If my love towards you and my Kaikeyi is true, it would happen” (Neelakantan 22). And she kept her promise which eventually brought Shanta back to Ayodhya as the only child to be with Dasharath at his deathbed. Shanta’s character is one of those epic characters that remotely comes with a frame of reference. The notion of ‘determination’ as theorized by Bal, does not get associated with this kind of characters. Hence, Shanta’s presence as a protagonist in a text in itself breaks the frame of reference of the dominant storyline of Ramayan. Shanta’s tale is a narrative of deprivation and of a quest for identity. Like Urmila, Shanta too craves for an identity of her own. She is the Subject of the narrative and the Object she seeks is her identity. With her actions and the choices she makes, Shanta outshines her valorous brothers and creates an identity of her own.

Rishyasringa’s character subtly plays a crucial role in the text. Rishyasringa, the ideal husband, the perfect companion of Shanta emerges as an ironic contrast to Ram. He defied his father and married Shanta. He acknowledged Shanta’s role in enlightening him about the value of human life in the world. Shanta taught him that spiritual pursuit alone cannot add meaning to a human life. An experience of worldly affairs is also required to obtain knowledge. Towards the end of the story, Shanta wishes that Sita should have a blissful life in Ayodhya. However, her wish is not fulfilled as Sita’s life was full of plight and suffering. In comparison with Shanta and Rishyasringa, Ram and Sita fall short as a couple in this text.

Kathleen M. Erndl, in her essay, “The Mutilation of Surpanakha”, elaborately compares and comments on the different representations of Surpanakha’s mutilation in the prominent tellings of Ramayan. However, before she begins the comparative study, she highlights the ethical issue that is involved in the whole episode. Erndl writes, “From a narrative point of

view, this episode proves a crucial turning point in the story, the catalyst which sets off a chain of events, notably Ravana's abduction of Sita, around which the remainder of the epic in turn revolves. It is also crucial from an ethical point of view, for it sheds light on Rama's character and on attitudes toward female sexuality in Indian culture" (M. Ernld 67-8). Neelakantan interprets the mutilation of Surpanakha and represents it from a different perspective in "**Meenakshi**". His focus remains not on the exact episode, rather on the ramification of it. The episode of Surpanakha's mutilation functions as a backdrop in this text. Meenakshi is placed in Ayodhya. Inclusivity of the text lies in Neelakantan's selection of characters - Sita, the queen of Ayodhya, Meenakshi, the disfigured, dejected princess of Lanka, and the socially marginalised chandali – all are positioned in an interrelated way in this text. Interestingly, again like "Shanta", Ram does not appear physically in the story, he emerges as a reference through the characters' dialogues.

The story is a female-centric interpretation of Ramayan. Neelakantan foregrounds Meenakshi's character to demonstrate a different perspective on the understanding of the Ramayan story. He does not re-create the episode of her mutilation, rather highlights how life changed for her because of that one incident. She is portrayed as an old, disfigured woman who attempts to negotiate with life. "She always felt like a worm in a putrid drain. Right from childhood, when she was the only sister to three angry brothers; in the palace of Lanka from where her brother, Lord Ravana ruled all the three worlds; or in the streets that she roamed endlessly after the brother of a God had cut off her nose, ears and breasts. She was just so insignificant, much like a worm" (Neelakantan 209). These lines comprehensibly demonstrate Meenakshi's status in her personal and social sphere. She has always been insignificant. Moreover, Lakshman's act of mutilating her and eventually Lanka's defeat transformed her status from a princess to a miserable destitute. Neelakantan further chooses chandali and Sita's character to portray a struggle similar to Meenakshi's. Chandali struggles to survive and to

keep her daughters alive. And Sita sets off to combat a new crisis in her life. These three female characters meet in the story; share each other's plight, and become a source of inspiration to each other.

In this text, Sita appears as a tool to reevaluate the act of Ravan abducting her as a fallout of Meenakshi's mutilation. She says, "Thinking back, sometimes I feel your brother was justified in kidnapping me" (Neelakantan 218). Meenakshi's response to this is even more subversive. It questions the need for a war, it critiques male chauvinism, "Dangerous thoughts to have, Sita. never tell a man he could have been wrong. I have done so and paid the price. All wars are without reason, Sita. Men fight to satisfy their egos, to secure their property, or to simply grab what belongs to others" (Neelakantan 218). Meenakshi's statement disrupts the dichotomy between Ram and Ravan. It places both of them on the same plane. While one fought to rescue Sita considering her as his property, the other had forcefully abducted Sita without her consent.

In "Meenakshi", the frame of reference of Surpanakha's character has been challenged and broken. As Bal suggests in her theory, there are certain characters regarding whom the readers have a predetermined perception. Surpanakha has been popularly perceived as an evil female character in Ramayan who intrudes the peaceful life of Ram, Lakshman and Sita and hence gets mutilated. It apparently is a tale of punishing an evil demoness to teach her a lesson. The plot of "Meenakshi" subverts this popular perception. Meenakshi is the 'Subject' of the text who seeks a life of dignity in Ayodhya. The life she craves for is the 'Object'. As Greimas explains, the actants exist in binary opposition. In this text, Meenakshi's life and what she craves for, stand contrary to each other. However, she strives to attain self-dignity. Even at the worst of the situations, she takes pride in her identity and attempts to transcend her deplorable state. This conscious and constant attempt on Meenakshi's part is a narrative tool that subverts the popular idea that Surpanakha was punished for her wrong deeds. The narrative of

"Meenakshi" challenges this idea. "Is a setting sun fragrant? Meenakshi wondered. Everything has fragrance, she reminded herself and smiled" (Neelakantan 223). The end of the story represents a defiant and dignified independent princess and not a mutilated and defeated demoness.

A different interpretation of Surpanakha's character is presented by Kane in ***Lanka's Princess***. "Brazen, aggressive, wild, ugly, untamed – ridiculed and laughed at by society then and now – these are the very stereotypical representations of Surpanakha that Kane breaks and presents her life as a victim" (Beena 90-91). The plot of the text includes multiple timelines. The story begins with a prologue which portrays Surpanakha born as Kubja in a subsequent life. She lives the life of a destitute in Mathura and meets Krishna one day. Krishna reminds her of her previous birth as Meenakshi, Lanka's princess and narrates the story of her previous life to her. The main text contains Meenakshi's story followed by an epilogue which captures her reincarnation as Phulwati many centuries later. In this life again she falls in love with Lakshman who is born as Pabuji, a tribal warrior. However, they can never unite. The epilogue is also narrated through Krishna's lens, "It was like before, Krishna decided – Lakshman the eternal celibate warrior refusing to accept Surpanakha, and she, eternally unrequited in his rejection" (Kane 298). This last sentence of the novel is a significant narrative tool. It singlehandedly summarizes Surpanakha's predicament in every life, which is, being deprived of love and companionship. This narrative tool leads to the understanding of the Subject and Object of the text. While Surpankha is the Subject in the narrative, the Object she relentlessly craves for is love.

Born as Meenakshi to sage Vishravas and the *asura* princess Kaikesi, she grew up in a complex family setup. Kaikesi's sole ambition was to build an *asura* empire and for that she needed valorous sons. She had three sons, Ravan, Kumbha, and Vibhishan. Kaikesi was explicitly displeased at the birth of a daughter. Hence, Meenakshi grew up being deprived of

maternal love. She gets entrapped in conflicting interests of her family members. While her mother and her eldest sibling Ravan crave for power, her father and Vibhishan advocate peace. Kumbha is sympathetic towards her, yet, cannot be of any substantial help. Meenakshi grew up to be a fierce princess who craved for love and attention, only to be perpetually deprived of it. An understanding of Meenakshi's character in *Lanka's Princess* depends on the understanding of the other characters surrounding her. Meenakshi's characterization manifests her transition from a sensitive young princess to a vengeful, fierce 'demoness'. The plot of the text unfolds the story of how this 'demoness' has been 'made'. Being deprived of familial love and being treated as an inferior to her brothers, Meenakshi seeks love and attention from outsiders. She meets Vidyujiva, the Kalkeya king in Ravan's wedding ceremony and eventually falls in love with him.

The characterization of Vidyujiva displays an ambiguity regarding his intention to marry Meenakshi. Kumbha introduces Vidyujiva to the readers as, "He is tough, ruthless, an expert spear fighter and a first-class archer. He is dangerous, calculating, shrewd and tricky… He has two obsessions – money and women" (Kane 96-97). While this description portrays him as a negative character, Meenakshi's perception of his character is contrary to this, hence the ambiguity is created. She ignores the fact that Vidyujiva is Ravan's enemy, she combats Ravan's fierce objection to their match and marries him only to get widowed by Ravan. It is never explicitly revealed in the text if Vidyujiva's marriage to Meenakshi was a well thought of strategy on his part nor is it confirmed that he truly aimed to conspire against Ravan and kill him to conquer Lanka. Vidyujiva craved for a child and Meenakshi gave birth to their son, Kumar. Finally, Meenakshi gets happily settled in life. But this happiness is short lived. Ravan gets Vidyujiva killed and the whole family tries to convince Meenakshi about the conspiracy he planned against Ravan. However, this episode is also ambiguous. Kane employs Kumbha's character to reveal Vidyujiva's conspiracy. Kumbha is portrayed as a kind and generous person

which is much contrary to the popular perception about his character. Among the three brothers, he is the one who has been gentle to Meenakshi. Hence, there is credibility in his words, "He was a traitor, Meenu! He always was, he was planning a coup. We found out, have rounded up the ministers who were supporting him" (Kane 167). However, Meenakshi refuses to believe her brothers because she trusted her husband, and she expresses her disbelief. "You confess about the deed by making it sound noble. But all of you are lying about him" (Kane 169), says Meenakshi. Vidyujiva's death has a major narrative significance. Although Meenakshi was always deprived of familial affection yet she never sought revenge. Vidyujiva's death provokes her to seek revenge on her family.

"Her family had destroyed her. Her love. Her husband. Her own small family. She hated all of them just now. She had been unwanted in her family, and it was Vidyujiva who had saved her from them. He had given her the love that none of them could offer, that warmth, that peace, that sense of being wanted, the belongingness. Nor her mother, nor her brothers" (Kane 170). The above excerpt represents one of the two key narrated events that contribute to the character development of Meenakshi in the text. The other narrated event is her son, Kumar's death. Kumar's death was caused by Ram and Lakshman. While searching for Kumar's murderer in the Dandak forest, Meenakshi comes across Ram and Lakshman and plans her revenge on them for killing Kumar, as well as on Ravan for killing Vidyujiva.

In *Lanka's Princess*, Kane assigns Meenakshi the pivotal role of initiating the war between Ram and Ravan. Her characterization offers a twist to the popular idea that she sought revenge on Ram and Lakshman after being mutilated by them, and hence, she urged Ravan to deliver justice to her. Further, she planned a revenge on Lakshman for killing her helpless son. She knew that the war would be devastating yet she orchestrated it, "This is what she wanted: a deliberated, planned one where she masterminded the campaign, without anyone knowing it, neither an unsuspecting Ravan nor the brothers to be her pawns in this game" (Kane 189). In

this text, Meenakshi exercises her agency in getting the justice she wanted. Meenakshi, the Subject of the narrative seeks justice as the Object and the idea of vengeance is inherently related to Meenakshi's perception of justice. Kane subscribes to the popular notion of Surpanakha's character, however, subtly challenges it through Meenakshi's characterisation and the choice of narrated events. The plot unfolds the transformation of Meenakshi to Surpanakha. It illustrates the agony that she has been subjected to and how her plight contributes to her angst and vengeance. "The recurrent experience of injustice forces her to live as an outcast or as an oddity in her family space. Kane attempts to bring her readers closer to the thought process of Meenakshi's character by making them see the other facets of her individuality" (Sharma and Jha 4). On one hand, she seeks justice for how she has been deprived by her family and wronged by Ravan, and on the other, she seeks revenge on Ram for her dishonour. Hence, the narrative presents both Ram and Ravan as the perpetrators. Meenakshi also attempts to avenge Kumar's murder, but for Lakshman, she executes a different plan. She reveals to Lakshman that Kumar was her son and reminds him that he killed Kumar while he was alone, meditating in the Dandak forest. Lakshman immediately succumbs to guilt and that is the revenge Meenakshi sought. The novel ends with an epilogue that Kane employs to refer to a later birth of Surpanakha in which she still remains deprived of love.

Similar to Surpanakha, Manthara is also a relegated character from Ramayan who has a peripheral existence in popular representations of the epic. Neelakantan reimagines Manthara's character in "**Manthara**". He challenges the dominant notion about her character and presents Manthara's perspective on the events that have shaped her identity. Manthara is introduced as the 'ugliest woman' in the kingdom of Kaikeya (Neelakantan 71). Ashwapati wanted to get the ugliest woman of his kingdom to be the foster mother to his children. Bhairava, a soldier, was assigned the task to find the ugliest woman and bring her to the king. He chose Manthara, "She is uncommonly ugly with a scar across her right cheek. She has a

hunchback and walks with difficulty" (Neelakantan 67). The king entrusted her with the responsibility of taking care of his infants, and her life changes overnight.

Neelakantan disrupts the 'determination' that prevails regarding Manthara's character and subverts her frame of reference. Manthara's character is re-created in this text, and along with that, the text establishes a novel perspective that unequivocally challenges the dominant notions associated with her character. Manthara, the 'infamous' nurse of Kaikeyi who plotted against Ram emerges as the affectionate foster mother who poses resistance to the blatant injustice that Kaikeyi was subjected to. The plot does not present a new story, it only seeks to highlight certain events that have remained unnoticed in the popular representations of Ramayan. An attempt to examine these unnoticed events creates a scope for re-exploration of Manthara's character. While it is well known that Kaikeyi exploited Dasharatha's commitment for granting her two boons, the reason behind his commitment remains largely overlooked. In a deadly battle against Sambrasura, Kaikeyi, the fierce warrior, saved Dasharatha's life in the battlefield. As a mark of gratitude, Dasharatha offered Kaikeyi a gift. Kaikeyi, being a dignified princess and a fierce warrior was initially reluctant to accept the gift and her reluctance hurt Dasharatha's ego. "I am King Dasharatha. Even the king of gods, Indra, takes my help. I am the scion of Ikshvaku, the emperor of Ayodhya. When I offer a gift, I expect it to be accepted with grace" (Neelakantan 102-103). Hence Kaikeyi asked for two gifts which later turned out to be Bharat's coronation as the king and Ram's exile. However, Bharat's right to inherit the throne was established by Dasharatha himself. While marrying Kaikeyi, he promised Yudhajit that Kaikeyi's son would ascend the throne of Ayodhya. But when the time of choosing the heir to the throne arrives, Dasharatha abides by the cultural tradition of Ayodhya, which was to coronate the eldest son as the king. Kaikeyi is deceived by Dasharatha and Manthara refuses to accept this deception.

Manthara, the Subject of the story craves to retain the identity that she attained of being the foster mother to Kaikeyi. This identity is precious to her and it is the Object that she seeks in the narrative space of "Manthara". When little Kaikeyi called her 'beautiful' and accepted her as her mother, it seems like a rebirth to Manthara. She dedicated herself in raising Kaikeyi and later, after Kaikeyi's marriage, she stands firm to protect her daughter's rights, "Manthara was determined to pay back Kaikeyi for all the love and respect she had shown on her. She pledged to watch over her foster daughter like a guard dog" (Neelakantan 111). Hence, she questions Dasharatha's integrity when he refuses to keep his promise of choosing Bharat as the king of Ayodhya. Examining this episode of the dominant Ramayan narrative, through Manthara's lens reveals a viewpoint that commonly gets ignored. It reveals that Dasharatha was deceitful and Kaikeyi was deceived. Manthara's character emerges to be a narrative tool to subvert the dominant idea that Ram was a victim of Kaikeyi's selfish acts. Her character brings to the fore Dasharatha's actions of injustice, deception and deprivation that Kaikeyi was subjected to, which Manthara refuses to accept. Through the plot of "Manthara", Neelakantan attempts to examine the reason behind Manthara's action of encouraging Kaikeyi to ask Dasharatha for the promised boons instead of critiquing the action itself. In this text, Manthara is portrayed as an affectionate mother figure who protests against the unjust acts that impacted her daughter's life, and not as a scheming, manipulative servant who is held responsible for Ram's exile.

The Fisher Queen's Dynasty written by Kane, depicts a part of the Mahabharat narrative from Satyavati's perspective. The Object of this narrative is 'ambition' that acts as the primary motivation to the Subject, Satyavati. She, along with Bhishm designed the future of the Kuru dynasty, which at the end only brought deep despair to her. But her initial days of life were the days of transgression and achievement. She was the daughter of King Vasu, the King of Chedi. She was born out of wedlock. King Vasu fell for her mother, Adrika's physical

beauty, got involved in a sexual union with her, but refused to accept her in his life. Furthermore, he rejected Kali too since she was a girl child, but accepted the son born as a twin to Kali. Kali was given to Dasharaj, the brother of the poor Adrika, who died a pitiful death giving birth to her children. Kali could never accept the injustice done to her. Kali drastically refused to accept the myths of kings uniting with apsaras to give birth to children. And it is often projected that the apsaras disown the child, whereas, the actual scenario is, the kings never agree to accept the children of dubious birth. Satyavati's children would also be subjected to a similar rejection. But Dasharaj makes the precondition to Shantanu that his biological son Bhishm should not claim the throne of Hastinapur, and also the children born to Shantanu and Satyavati should be declared as future successors to the throne.

The text repeatedly questions the grand epic, in every possible way. Kali questions the set norms when she argues why a woman cannot make use of her physical beauty to fulfil her ambition, when men can make use of the power of their position to enjoy any woman. She expresses her mind clearly to her foster father, that, "If men can use women, why can't women get something out of men? Beauty and lust is just that – a means to an end." (Kane,32). Transgression lies not only in Satyavati's association with men, but also in her social outlook. At a very young age she realized that the world is dominated by the powerful, and that the downtrodden were born to live a life of deprivation and plight. "Parashar, in his moment of passion, had been as mindless as King Vasu. If one had been a man of power, the other had been a person of knowledge – both privileged and powerful – imposing on the weak and vulnerable." (Kane,39). But Satyavati was neither weak nor vulnerable, she was strong-willed and ambitious.

Satyavati designed her life, rather than letting life dictate her. She emerges as an aide to Bhishm in running the administration of Hastinapur. She succeeds in turning the hostile people of Hastinapur to her side, who were initially tremendously critical of her for being the

cause of the disinheritance of Bhishm. Satyavati does everything that is needed to fulfil her ambition, but also remains immensely stoical in facing the consequences that her ambition had begotten. Kane, in her novel has attempted to render Satyavati her voice. The novel ends by the time of the conclusion of the epic war. Satyavati resigns to the woods, and decides to submit herself to Ganga. The strong woman who once said that, "I learnt to love like a man – to love without feelings," apologises to Ganga for doing wrong to her child Bhishm. She remained equally resolute till she immersed herself in the holy water. She pleaded to Ganga, "Absolve me, oh Ganga, forgive me for what I did. Wash away my sins, give me my salvation…" (Kane 325). And "Ganga had accepted her in her arms." (Kane 325).

Satyavati's character is a strongly referential one. Any reader acquainted with the Mahabharat story would recognize her as the fisher girl who, through a firm negotiation, became the queen of Hastinapur. In *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, Kane attempts to confront the predictability that predominantly exists about her character. This 'narrative' confrontation gets displayed through the representation of Satyavati's character.

Satyavati's narrative presence in Madhavan's ***The One Who Swam with the Fishes*** presents a fresh dimension. In this text, Madhavan explores the journey of a young girl, Matsyagandhi who is fiercely ambitious to attain a royal status by marrying the Kuru king Shantanu. Madhavan exhibits a discretion in selecting the narrative events. She does not portray the Kuru queen Satyavati, rather she focuses on the 'making' of a queen. The queen Satyavati's character has already remained peripheral in epic representations, further, exploration of a young Matsyagandhi is rare. Madhavan approaches this gap that exists in exploring Satyavati's character in different representations and presents a unique tale. From a narrative point of view, Madhavan's characterization of Matsyagandhi serves the purpose of a prelude to the epic character Satyavati and her popular interpretations.

Madhavan disrupts the frame of reference that is predominantly associated with Satyavati's character and alters Satyavatis' tale. In this text, young Matsyagandhi is assigned an agency to determine the course of her life. The plot of the text is a narrative tool that subtly hints that there might be an improbability inherent in the story of Satyavati's birth that is prevalent in the popular Mahabharat narratives. A king falling in love with a fisher girl and wanting to marry her lacks approval from the socio-cultural point of view. Hence, the union of the king with an apsara emerged. Madhavan's text challenges the dominant story and disrupts the age-old notion of Satyavati's identity. The plot of *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* narrates how a teenager fisher girl, under the guidance of her adoptive father, designs a plan to allure an old king in order to become his wife. This narrative component of the plot reverses the popular idea of Shantanu's chanced encounter with a voluptuously charming Satyavati and falling in love with her. In this text, Shantanu has been made to fall in love with Matsyagandhi because Matsyagandhi wants that to fulfil her ambition. This ambition to attain a royal status is the Object of the narrative that the Subject, Matsyagandhi seeks.

Although 'ambition' appears to be the primary Object of the quest, the reason behind that ambition is also examined through Matsyagandhi's character. She was disowned at birth by her biological father, and hence, deprived of the royal status that was her birthright. This deprivation and the constant motivation from her foster father, Dasharaja to reclaim her royal identity inspired her to execute the plan of marrying Shantanu. Matsyagandhi never forgets her actual identity, "I – the daughter of an apsara and a king – to be treated like a common lackey in this fishwife's home!" (Madhavan 22). Matsyagandhi emerges as an independent, free thinking young girl who prioritizes her identity over love and other affections. It is discretely implied through her characterization that she is not in love with Shantanu, rather she exploits the marriage with him as a mere opportunity to attain an upward social status. Relatively, she enjoys her relationship with Parashara, "That first day with Parashara stayed in my mind for a

long time. I kept going back to it, turning it over in my mind. It was just… a perfect day" (Madhavan 91). She further recalls, "Parashara told me how the world began and how the ocean was churned, and explained the world to me, how it moved through the cosmos with the help of the gods, how there was an earth, a sea and a sky, and how these had to work together" (Madhavan 91). Contrary to the dominant perception, Matsyagandhi and Parashara share mutual love and respect. It is not merely a pleasure-seeking act on the sage's side and a bargain for a lotus smell on Matsyagandhi's side. Matsyagandhi's characterization shatters the mainstream notions about her character. The characterization projects a fierce, downtrodden girl who exercises her agency to disrupt and subvert the identity that was imposed on her and successfully attains the royal identity that she rightfully deserved.

In her book, *The Dharma of Justice in the Sanskrit Epics: Debates on Gender, Varna, and Species*, Ruth Vanita comments, "Feminist scholars commenting on the Amba story have largely confined themselves to discussing whether or not Amba succeeds in taking revenge" (Vanita 118). Vanita, further presents a significant observation related to Amba's representation. She says, "No commentator has considered whether Amba has other options besides revenge and whether revenge of the kind she wants is indeed the best way for her to obtain satisfaction" (Vanita 118). Amba's voice is generally unheard in popular representations. She is primarily associated with Shikhandini, her reincarnation, who was responsible for Bhishma's death in the war of Kurukshetra. And as Vanita comments, the other factor associated with Amba is the debate about her success or failure in seeking revenge. Komarraju and Madhavan have transcended this limited scope of representations of Amba's character in their texts, "**Priestess**" and ***The One Who Had Two Lives*** respectively. They have assigned her a voice which surpasses the theme of revenge and the debate associated with it. Through their characterizations of Amba, Amba reclaims the significant position she has in the epic narrative.

"Priestess", Amba's tale, is the first story of Komarraju's book titled, *The Rise of Hastinapur*. It is important to have a brief understanding of the title of Komarraju's book, the title of Book One, and the choice of characters reexplored in the book. The title of the book is *The Rise of Hastinapur*. The mention of Hastinapur, in this context does not only refer to the geographical locale that appears as the primary spatial entity in Mahabharat. It also has a metaphorical reference. Metaphorically, the title suggests the events that led to the great war of Kurukshetra, and the characters who were involved in it. Hence, Amba's story being the first book of the novel has considerable significance from the narrative point of view. It is implied that the author considers the often unnoticed and the lesser explored Amba as a key character who played a significant role in the rise of Hastinapur. Further in the text, this notion appears to be more prominent. Amba in this story has been portrayed as Shikhandini's mother. Komarraju re-creates Amba's tale that primarily centered around her urge to seek revenge. In the course of this re-creation, Amba is portrayed as a priestess who, through a ritual called 'Right of Fertility', unites with Drupad and gives birth to Shikhandini. This narrative event of the text disrupts the entire idea related to Amba and Shikhandini's character. The plot of "Priestess" implies that although Amba could not kill Bhishma, yet she is biologically related to the person responsible for his death, in the same life itself and not in a later birth.

This major deviation from the conventional representations of Amba's character, singlehandedly assigns her a key role in the epic narrative. In this text, initially she is unsuccessful in avenging Bhishma. However, at the end of the story, she transcends her indomitable urge for revenge and accepts motherhood gracefully, "Amba clutched the infant to her bosom and whispered: 'I shall call you Shikhandini'" (Komarraju 116). Throughout the plot, Amba is portrayed as the woman who has been wronged by every man in his life. She emerges to be a female avenger who desperately seeks revenge. She performs excruciating penance to receive a boon from Shiva so that she can kill Bhishma. The penance was directed

towards achieving a destructive goal. The *Amba Upakhyana* (subtale on Amba) in Vyasa Mahabharat depicts her as one of the epic women characters who refrained from depending on a man to deliver justice to her. She took the responsibility upon herself of seeking revenge. In the context of the Vyasa Mahabharat, "Central to the story is Amba's defiance of the normative gender conventions that circumscribes the female body. Throughout this narrative, Amba asserts her agency and expresses her formidable will to revenge her wrongdoer" (Howard 217). Although Amba's characterization in "Priestess" apparently subscribes to her predominant image, yet, it reflects major deviation. Amba in this text overcomes her desire of revenge in a dignified manner. She is not depicted as a pitiable character who failed to attain her goal, rather she emerges empowered as she succeeds in negotiating with her life.

Amba's characterization in ***The One Who Had Two Lives*** exhibits an interplay of diverse emotions. Madhavan's re-exploration of Amba's character transcends the stereotypical perception associated with her regarding the aspect of revenge. Amba's representation in this text breaks the frame of reference. Her characterization shatters the primary determining factor of her image which is associated with the fierce urge she had to avenge herself. Further, Amba's tale in this text emerges to be a tale of love and companionship between Amba and Lalita. Bheeshma, Vichitravirya, and the other epic characters become peripheral and the love between Amba and Lalita occupies the centre stage. Madhavan introduces Lalita's character to complement Amba's character. "While revenge brings satisfaction, another kind of satisfaction arises from moving on and enjoying a different life" (Vanita 118). Although Amba and Lalita do not enjoy their life, yet they move on leaving behind the humiliation they were subjected to. This is a narrative tool that reflects subversion. Madhavan situates Amba's longing for love and affection at the centre of the plot. Her craving for revenge does not display a fierce avenging attitude, but rather a helpless submission to her fateful life. She undertakes excruciating penance seeking an opportunity to avenge herself in her next life which explicitly reflects her

resignation in the present life. Amba's character in this text, evokes sympathy than awe. This altered perspective renders a fresh look to the character. Further, Lalita's narrative presence adds more transgression from the dominant perception associated with Amba's tale. An analysis of Amba's characterization in *The One Who Had Two Lives* is primarily based on these two factors – Amba's craving for familial love, and her relationship with Lalita.

The reimagination of Amba's character in this text subverts the aspect of her identity from multiple directions. Amba is the narrator of her story. She recounts the history of both her paternal and maternal family at the initiation of her narration. According to the family history that she provides, her maternal grandfather, Jayanta was not a king but a tribal chieftain and he married the daughter of a potter who was Amba's grandmother. Hence, Amba does not carry a royal lineage from her mother's side. Further, her father, the king of Kashi is assumed to be a bastard son who was drunk on power and who killed his elder brothers to ascend the throne. With this kind of a family history, Amba contemplates and questions her identity from the very beginning. "If the king has no caste, what caste do his daughters have? Potter's granddaughters and the daughters of a bastard. No one must know, I'm only telling you because you should know who our ruler is, no one must know" (Madhavan 22). Following this statement, Amba reveals that her father is an able ruler but not a kind man, and her mother is timid and indifferent towards the family affairs. Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika was reared as princesses but were deprived of familial affection. As the plot unfolds, it is understood that Amba looked for an emotional refuge in Salva. Salva was a weak prince who would not possibly make a good king neither a good husband, yet, Amba chose him. However, Salva failed her and eventually, Bheeshma too failed her. Amba succumbs to the plight of these rejections and seeks revenge helplessly. Further, she chooses to find solace in Lalita's company while she approaches her death. Lalita is a crucial narrative agent in this text. Her character serves two distinct purposes. First, she becomes Amba's sole companion until they both die together. Hence, through her

character, the absence of a husband in Amba's life has been compensated. Lalita is a eunuch, born in a dom's family. She refers to her identity with pride, and states "But disposing of the dead is a job, like any other, and the Doms do it with respect for the person the corpse once was" (Madhavan 130). Lalita, a socially marginalized character replaces Bheeshma and Salva within the narrative sphere of this text. Hence, her character emerges to be a potential tool for attaining subversion. Second, Lalita's character directly refers to the aspect of transsexuality associated with Amba in her reincarnation as Shikhandini. The narrative space that has been assigned to the tale of Amba and Lalita is placed in between Part One and Part Two of *The One Who Had Two Lives*. Part One is entitled, "Amba", Part Two is called "Shikhandini", and the narrative space in between is referred to as "The In-Between". From a narrative point of view, Lalita's relationship with Amba on one hand concludes Amba's story, and on the other begins Shikhandini's tale. It reaffirms Amba's connection with Shikhandini.

Further, Lalita's narrative presence reiterates Amba's predicament regarding her identity. Vanita postulates that Amba did not identify herself as a woman who has a husband. Again, she narrowly exhibits the traits of a man who seeks revenge by killing (Vanita 117). "She says she has lost the dharma of being a wife and the world of a husband, and has therefore become neither man nor woman" (Vanita 117). Lalita's character complements this duality and complexity of Amba's character. Lalita remains committed to Amba until they die together and she promises to serve Amba in her next life, "I, Lalita, once Jinodaya, witness your vow and ask that the gods let me serve you in your next life as well" (Madhavan 146). Amba resigns to death after going through extreme penance only to attain a success in a subsequent life. Her last words reflect that the success she sought did not remain limited to avenging herself only. It also was a craving for a 'successful' and fulfilling life filled with familial love. "Will anyone wonder what became of me? Will my mother wake up as I die, and feel it pierce her heart? Will my sisters have children and see something in their faces that remind them of me?" (Madhavan

147). Further, she craves to know if Salva would think of her while being with his wife, and if Bheeshma would repent ruining her life. “And will Bheeshma think of me from time to time, perhaps when he is riding or hunting, will he think *once I stole a girl and I stole her life*?” (Madhavan 147).

In this chapter an analysis of the characters selected for the present research has been attempted through the lens of narratology. It aimed at understanding how the representations of these characters offer to disrupt the frame of reference associated with these characters. Urmila, Shanta, Surpanakha Manthara, Satyavati, and Amba – these characters have commonly either remained less explored or have been represented as negative characters. The authors of the primary texts selected for this study do not essentially represent a completely altered perspective regarding these characters. However, they aim to highlight these characters’ perspectives, their side of the story and their understanding of the narrative events that concern them. The reimaginations of these characters aim to challenge the ‘determination’ that has been dominantly prevalent about them. Further, the reimaginations of these characters offer fresh perspectives in reading the epics, Ramyan and Mahabharat. The following chapter presents a comparative study among the selected texts that represent the same character depicted by two different authors in two different texts.

Chapter 5

Inter-textual Connections between Narratological Components: A Comparative Study

5.1 Overview

The present chapter explores representation of characters that are common as protagonists of different texts. For instance, Surpanakha is the protagonist of both *Lanka's Princess* by Kane and "Meenakshi" by Neelakantan. Amba is the chief character of Komarraju's "Priestess" and Madhavan's *The One Who Had Two Lives*. Similarly, Satyavati plays the key role in Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and Madhavan's *The One Who Swam with the Fishes*. Although the protagonists are same, they are presented in different manner in each text. This chapter presents a comparative study of character representations with the backdrop of an analysis of how the plot and points of view also differ from one text to another even though the key character remains the same.

5.2 Satyavati and the tales of Ambition

Comparison and Contrast between Plots

A close reading of the texts chosen for analysis in this chapter demonstrates potential scope for comparison and contrast at three levels – plot, point of view, and characters. Although the key focus of this chapter is a comparative analysis of characters, a comparative study of the plots and points of view is also essential since it contributes to the understanding of the similarities and differences in the portrayal of the characters. The plot of Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* captures the entire life of Satyavati. The title of the text is suggestive of the narrative elements in the plot. It is the story of the fisher queen and her dynasty. Multiple characters and their perspectives are included in the narration to develop the story of Satyavati. Although the focus remains on Satyavati and the role she plays in the progression of the Kuru

clan, the plot also narrates the journey of a fisher girl, a journey that is not a calm and simple one. It is fraught with deprivation, humiliation, and struggle.

The plot of this text approaches and narrates Satyavati's story from multiple dimensions. Her story begins with the episodes of her interaction with sage Parashar, her marriage with Shantanu and the ensuing struggle to establish her position in the royal domain. In between, her birth and subsequent abandonment by her father, a crucial narrative element is also included. Though she has Bhishm's unconditional support, yet, it is not an easy task for a fisher girl to establish herself as a queen. The people of Hastinapur, including Shantanu, blame her for depriving Bhishm of his rightful inheritance. The common people refuse to accept her as their queen. She is even addressed as 'Queen Daseyi'. "The name 'Daseyi' meant one of the *dasa* – slave, or at the most polite, an aboriginal woman" (Kane 124). However, she maintains her dignity and keeps proving herself as an able queen and administrator who succeeds in being an appropriate ally to Bhishm in managing the state affairs. She ensures the progression of the Kuru clan as well. After both her sons from Shantanu die childless, as the queen-mother, she insists her first son Krishna Dwaipayan Vyasa to father the royal heirs who are born to the two widowed queens, Ambika and Ambalika. This ensured the continuation of the Kuru clan. The sons whom Vyasa fathered though are not the biological heirs of the Kurus. Therefore, Dhritarashtra and Pandu and their children can be referred to as heirs of the fisher queen.

The plot of Madhavan's *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* also narrates the story of Satyavati, but there is a difference in the approach. It does not narrate the entire life of Satyavati. Instead, it focuses only on the fisher girl's ambition to become a queen and her journey towards fulfilling her ambition. The plot oscillates between narrating the past and the present. The focus of the narration remains on a young Satyavati becoming a queen. It does not deal with her aspiration of becoming the grand matriarch of the Kuru dynasty. The plot unfolds a young girl's ambitions, aspirations and her tremendous urge to transcend her social status.

The plot traces the psyche of young Matsyagandhi who is ready to accept any challenge to attain her goal of being a queen. Madhavan's text ends with Matsyagandhi proceeding towards Hastinapur after her marriage. "And then I am placed in the palanquin, gently as an egg, and the curtains are drawn for my privacy and no one can see what I do inside – which is kick off my slippers and lie there looking up at the bejewelled roof. The horses' hooves behind me and in front of me kick out a rhythm: *destiny, destiny, destiny*" (Madhavan 148). This excerpt from the last chapter of the book clearly demonstrates the focal point of the plot. Young Matsyagandhi challenges the destiny of abandonment and deprivation and aims at altering her destiny. The story ends with her achievement.

Although representing the same character, the plots of the stories differ in thematic approach. *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* is a story of Satyavati's whole life. *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* captures the anxious teenager, Matsyagandhi. The plot of Kane's story is multidimensional. Situating Satyavati at the centre, the plot incorporates the stories of multiple other characters and their perspectives. Bhishm has a major role to play in Kane's text. Satyavati and Bhishm almost share equal narrative space in the plot. The text begins with a prologue which is Bhishm's narrative. In that prologue, Bhishm is seen at his death bed at Kurukshetra. He recollects his life and refers to Satyavati as being the primary cause behind the catastrophe that befell the Kuru dynasty. "He had destroyed them all, for her – for that one woman… *Satyavati*" (Kane 3). In Kane's text, Satyavati is assigned the role of both, a provider, and a destroyer. She disinherits Bhishm from his birth right to secure the rights of her sons which changed the dynamics of the royal family of the Kurus. Yet, she is the one who has a key contribution in the progression of the royal clan. This vital contribution of Satyavati which is at the centre of Kane's text, often remains unheard.

Compared to the plot of *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, the plot of Madhavan's *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* contains a narrower scope of narration. Madhavan focuses only on

the initial phase of Satyavati's life in which the primary goal of being a queen is attained. However, the struggle of retaining her dignity and position as a queen, that the character of Satyavati faces in Kane's text, is missing in Madhavan's text. The plot of *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* is unidimensional. The focus remains entirely on Satyavati and the story ends with her marriage. The plot of Kane's text is all encompassing in nature, while Madhavan's text deals with a much-ignored aspect, i.e., tracing the psyche of young Satyavati.

Comparison and Contrast between Point of View

Like the difference in plots, the points of view in both the texts are different from each other. There is a difference in focalization. The plot of *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator and the narration displays zero focalization. In this text, the narrator knows more than what the characters speak. Not only that, the narrator also has access to the minds of multiple characters. The plot of *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* is narrated in first person by the key character of the text, Matsyagandhi. She narrates the story of her journey that transcended her from Matsyagandhi to Satyavati. The narration displays internal focalization where Matsyagandhi not only speaks about herself but also about the narrated events. A difference in point of view is noticeable in the representation of the narrated events as well. Madhavan has focused on the events singularly related to Matsyagandhi's life. The whole narration centres around Matsyagandhi in Madhavan's text. Compared to that, Kane's text displays a broader perspective that is inclusive in nature. Satyavati's ambition to attain a royal identity is not the only concern displayed in this text. Apart from her story in the plot, Kane also includes the perspectives of Bhishm, Shantanu, Amba and a few other characters. Satyavati, in this text, emerges beyond the ambitious young girl who aims to be a part of the royal domain. She evolves as a provider to her fishing community as well as a support to the royal court and common people of Hastinapur. She grooms herself as the queen-mother who places the public interest above the personal interest. She insists Bhishm to break

his vow and to marry and beget children so that the Kuru clan progresses. Once Bhishm refuses to do that, she seeks Vyasa's help for *niyoga*. However, Madhavan's Matsyagandhi cannot rise above her personal interest. Her personal triumph is the focal point of the narrative.

Comparison and Contrast between Characterization

The difference in authorial perception determines the difference in the reimagination of the same character in two different texts. Satyavati's character in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* displays a sturdy female agency. Through this agency she transcends her identity of a fishing-girl, and also ensures an upliftment of her fishing community. Again, as the queen of Hastinapur, she involves herself in state affairs, assists Bhishm in making political strategies, performs every responsibility of a guardian to her children and to the citizens of Hastinapur. She also chooses to ignore the deplorable perception that the people of Hastinapur have about her. Instead of leading a secluded life of a widow, she makes her strong presence felt in every aspect of the royal household as well as in the court. Mahabharat, like the usual nature of an epic, is a story of illustrious heroes. Satyavati's character in Kane's text, evolves from Kali to Satyavati, traversing the male dominated domain of politics. Kane's text situates Satyavati as a key character of the epic narrative of Mahabharat.

Madhavan's reimaging of Matsyagandhi's character is a prelude to the character of the queen-mother Satyavati. Matsyagandhi in *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* is a restless yet resilient young girl who is fiercely ambitious. "I, a foundling girl with nothing value to offer, only a smell that followed me around like a bad reputation" (Madhavan 54). Being abandoned by her royal father and having a body odour that smells of fish, are the two factors that kindle her ambition. These are the factors that constantly remind her that the fishing community is not her place to belong. Her sole aim is to overcome the downtrodden life that was imposed on her. This thought is befitting of a young girl. Whereas, the matured Satyavati in Kane's text displays a broader perspective. The thought process of the two characters differs. While Matsyagandhi

in *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* is focused on her personal upliftment, Satyavati in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* concentrates on attaining well-being of her community as well as of the people of Hastinapur. The characterization of Dasharaj, her foster father, also differs from one text to the other. In Kane's narrative, Dasharaj is the primary support to Satyavati. He plays a significant role in negotiating with Shantanu and later with Bhishm in securing the future of her daughter's descendants. Kane's characterization of Dasharaj subscribes to the dominant representation of his character. However, Madhavan re-creates Dasharaj's character. Once he ensures that Parashar's boon eradicated the smell of fish from Matsyagandhi's body, he designs a plot to arrange an encounter between Matsyagandhi and Shantanu. Deviating from the dominant narrative of a chance meeting between the two, Madhavan introduces a well plotted meeting that is planned by the father to fulfil the ambition of his adopted daughter. Madhavan also deviates in re-creating the episode of Bheeshma's oath. Unlike the dominant idea, Bheeshma is confronted by Chitravasu, the biological son of Dasharaj and Matsyagandhi's adoptive brother. Though younger than Matsyagandhi in age, Chitravasu functions as a representative of Dasharaj in negotiating with Bheeshma. And once Bheeshma takes the oath of celibacy, Matsyagandhi attains her identity as Satyavati, the future queen of Hastinapur. "I am Satyavati and I have reached my destiny" (Madhavan 142). While Kane's Satyavati exhibits a self-assertive nature, Madhavan's young Matsyagandhi relies on her father and brother for support and confidence.

5.3 Amba and the tales of Revenge

Amba the protagonist of Komarraju's text, "Priestess". Amba is also one of the two leading characters of Madhavan's *The One Who Had Two Lives*. Amba's tale is primarily a tale of injustice and revenge. Both, Komarraju and Madhavan have appropriated the dominant tellings of Amba's story. Revenge is at the core of their Interpretations; however, the interpretations are transgressive and they differ from the dominant tellings.

Comparison and Contrast between Plots

Amba's tale constitutes a part of a larger narrative in both Komarraju and Madhavan's texts. Hence, in both cases, the narration has a limited scope for reexploration of the character. However, within that limited scope, the plots represent different stories. Komarraju concentrates on the injustice meted out to Amba by the different men in her life, especially by Bhishma; and the subsequent efforts that Amba makes to avenge his wrong doings. Whereas, Madhavan focuses primarily on the relationship between Amba and Bheeshma that leads to the injustice done to her and her subsequent struggle for revenge. A prologue, titled 'Ganga Speaks', precedes the tale of Amba in "Priestess". Ganga is the narrator in the prologue. She introduces the epic narrative of the Kurus and considers Amba's tale to be the most crucial one in the ruin of Hastinapur. Further, she opines that Bhishma's (Devavrata) ruin was primarily responsible for the devastation of the Kuru clan. "Amba's tale, then, is also the first chapter in the tale of Devavrata's ruin" (Komarraju 5). In the text, Amba's tale follows this statement. It begins with Amba reaching Saubala to meet King Salva whom she was engaged to. However, her meeting with Salva does not turn out to be a happy reunion between two lovers. She returns to Salva, after rejecting marriage with Vichitraveerya in Hastinapur, only to face ruthless rejection. Salva treats her as the queen of Hastinapur and not as his beloved. "The day Devavrata won you and your sisters in the battle on the riverbank, all of you became Hastinapur's queens, my lady – Your Majesty" (Komarraju 9), says Salva. He further reveals that Bhishma asked for a bride price for returning Amba to Salva. Amba soon realizes that she is entrapped in a web of male ego which only perceives her as an object or a property, and not as a human being. She retaliates to Salva, "You understand nothing! All you understand is to treat a maiden like she were property, to be fought over, to be won, to be given away in return

for a price. I now know that when you pursued me in Kashi, you did so because in your eyes, I was prize to be won" (Komarraju 13).

Salva's rejection emerges as a jolt to Amba which is followed by a series of emotional setbacks meted out by Bhishma as well as Vichitraveerya. Amba perceives Bhishma to be the primary perpetrator. From a narrative point of view, Salva's rejection is the point of departure for Amba's story in Komarraju's text. It is the beginning of Amba's story as well as it is the narrative juncture from where she undertakes a journey of excruciating penance to attain the power to avenge Bhishma. Amba's story unfolds a narrative of injustice, agony, and revenge. Komarraju, in his text, concentrates on the path that Amba chooses to attain justice and revenge. The plot unfolds a narration that includes political strategies and ethical questions. He deviates from the dominant narrative about Shikhandini's birth. This deviation transgresses the dominant notion. The plot of this story, emphasizes on two aspects regarding Amba's character contextualizing those in the Mahabharat discourse. First, the narration highlights Amba's contribution in the epic events which is significant yet often ignored in the popular readings of Mahabharat. Second, the narration accentuates her role by identifying her as the primary cause of Bhishma's destruction. The dominant narrative of Shikhandini's birth as a reincarnation of Amba attributes more significance to Shikhandini's character than Amba's. Komarraju undermines that idea and focuses on Amba. Through exemplary penance Amba becomes a priestess. Eventually, through Rite of Fertility which is a sacred practice in the hermitage of Parashuram, she unites with Drupad and gives birth to Shikhandini. In "Priestess", Amba does not die. She lives to become instrumental in the destruction of the Kuru family.

Unlike Komarraju, Madhavan includes both Amba and Shikhandini in her text. She divides the text into two parts. Amba's story is narrated in Part One followed by Shikhandini's in Part Two. The other noticeable difference between "Priestess" and *The One Who Had Two Lives* is the difference in thematic elements. While Komarraju explores Amba's tremendous

urge to seek revenge on Bhishma, Madhavan attempts to highlight the emotional turmoil that Amba has to encounter and finally succumb to. The plot of *The One Who Had Two Lives* apparently unfolds the popular tale of Amba. However, this popular tale of Amba is represented by weaving in emotional and psychological intricacies and complexities which actually challenge the dominant narrative about Amba. Every narrative event about Amba, in this text, has its own complexities. The plot unfolds a story in which Salva is not the ideal lover. Vichitravirya is also not the ideal crown prince of Hastinapur. Bheeshma emerges as an offender not because he separated Amba from Salva and forced her to marry Vichitravirya, but because he refuses to marry her. The plot of this text explicitly narrates Amba's fascination towards Bheeshma. The plot further represents an intriguing emotional equation between Amba and Bheeshma, and later, between Amba and Lalita. The aspect of revenge is present with ba limited narrative scope in Madhavan's text because the focus is primarily on Amba's pain and suffering rather than her urge for revenge. She succumbs to that pain and submits herself to death with the hope that maybe in some other life she can attain justice for herself.

Compare and Contrast between Points of View

There are explicit differences noticeable in the points of view of the two texts. Komarraju employs both, third person narration and first person in "Priestess". The first person narration, with internal focalization, represents Amba contemplating on life. Her thoughts oscillate between two prominent factors – the injustice she has been subjected to and in determining the ways to ensure Bhishma's destruction. The third person omniscient narrator captures the narrative events that revolve around Amba. This narration provides an insight into the thoughts of other characters like, Salva, Bhishma, Satyavati, Parashuram, Drupad etc. It unfolds a broader perspective since it tells the story of different characters. Amba's tale in *The One Who Had Two Lives* is narrated by the protagonist herself through first person narration. The narration displays internal focalization. Amba narrates the story of her life as she

experiences it. The narration captures the complexity of her emotions, her dilemma about Salva's intention behind marrying her, her delicate yet fierce desire for Bheeshma, and her bond with Lalita. The narration intriguingly captures her angst and suffering.

Points of view is different from one text to the other in terms of narrated events as well. While Komarraju includes episodes of Amba's days in Hastinapur where she lived as one of Vichitravirya's many partners, her encounter with Drupad in Panchal, and her life of austerity in Parashram's hermitage, Madhavan chooses to exclude the character of Parashuram completely. Amba's agonizing penance is highlighted, but the role Parashuram played in that context is omitted. Rather it is the character of Lalita who finds prominence in the narration. This particular perspective subverts the dominant idea. The sage's position is substituted by a eunuch who renders peace and comfort to Amba's parched soul and accompanies her even to her death. It is a subtle yet major difference between Komarraju and Madhavan's representations. Again, the transgression that Komarraju attributes to his narrative regarding Shikhandini's birth is absent in Madhavan's text. Madhavan follows the popular idea of Amba's reincarnation in the form of Shikhandini. The same epic character is reimagined and represented through different points of view that adds to the novelty in their portrayal.

Compare and Contrast between Characterizations

The novelty in the portrayal of the epic characters creates further scope for reimagining them. Komarraju depicts Amba as an indomitable warrior who refuses to be defeated in a war. Amba fights all the men in her life who have done injustice to her. Amba raises a strong voice against male domination. She considers Parashuram as an offender as he failed to kill Bhishma and says, "You – you are all the same! You come in different garbs, all of you; my father, Salva, Bhishma, Drupad, Jarutha, Parashuram – all of you are the same *fiend* that go by different names" (Komarraju 112). Disappointed with Parashuram, she determines to seek revenge on Bhishma on her own. Komarraju's Amba challenges and subverts the idea that women need to

be protected by men and justice has to be delivered to them by men only. She seeks strength through her penance and finally finds contentment in Shikhandini's birth. Madhavan's characterization of Amba differs from Komarraju. Amba in *The One Who Had Two Lives* is not a fierce revenge seeker. Rather, she is a fighter who stoically accepts her defeat and resigns to death. Her fight is more about wanting to be loved rather than seeking revenge as she is deprived of love since her childhood. Her parents failed her, so did Salva. And finally Bheeshma, who refused to accept her. The only person who has unconditionally loved her is Lalita. Lalita transforms to be her *sakhi* (friend) from the position of being her maid. In *The One Who Had Two Lives*, Lalitha's character attributes a fresh interpretation to the age-old narrative of Amba. The character manifests a prominent queer perspective. Kevin McGrath in *STRI: Feminine Power in the Mahabharata* mentions Shikhandini as Sikhandin-Amba and refers to Shikhandini's 'transexual state' (McGrath 112). Not only through Shikhandini but also through Lalita's character, Madhavan explores the idea of transsexuality. Lalita remains inseparable from Amba. She accompanies Amba to Hastinapur when Amba, Ambika and Ambalika were abducted by Bheeshma. Madhavan also reexplores Ambika's character. While, in Komarraju's text, Ambika and Ambalika find very limited narrative scope, in Madhavan's interpretation, they have their respective roles to play. Within the limited narrative scope, Ambika emerges to be a character with independent thoughts and deep emotions. She accepted her fate of being Vichitravirya's wife but at the same time was resilient in performing a wife's duty as the marriage happened against her will. This aspect is missing in Komarraju's text. Therefore, the selection and portrayal of characters reflects significant difference between the two texts.

5.4 Surpanakha and the tales of Resilience

Surpanakha's tale, as narrated in Neelakantan's "Meenakshi" and Kane's *Lanka's Princess*, is primarily a tale of resilience, although the representation of the stories is different.

"Meenakshi" is a short story that encapsulates the incidents of one day. *Lanka's Princess*, on the other hand, is a novel, hence, its narrative scope is broader than that of "Meenakshi". Characters and narrative events, both have a broader representation in *Lanka's Princess*. Similarly, the choice of the epic events and the re-imagination of the characters are different in the two texts.

Comparison and Contrast between the Plots

Neelakantan has positioned Meenakshi in Ayodhya, not in Lanka. The plot of the text revolves around the conversation between Meenakshi and chandali. This conversation occupies the major narrative space. However brief it might be, it is insightful and subversive. *Lanka's Princess*, on the other hand, has a lengthy storyline. The plot includes multiple perspectives of multiple characters to locate the predicament of Surpanakha. Positioning her at the centre of a multidimensional story, Kane has attempted to analyse the transition from Meenakshi to Surpanakha. The plot includes her relationship with her parents, siblings, husband, and her encounter with Ram and Lakshman. The plot incorporates narration of multiple stories. Compared to *Lanka's Princess*, "Meenakshi" has a terse plot with limited scope. It unfolds a story of a vanquished old woman living a defeated yet stoic life.

Comparison and Contrast between Points of View

The volume of the two stories and their narrative contents are different from each other. The most striking difference lies in the points of view of the narratives. The main story of *Lanka's Princess* is narrated by a third person narrator with zero focalization. It is mentioned in both the prologue and the epilogue that the narrator is Krishna. "Meenakshi" is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator with zero focalization. Apart from the narrative voice, there is hardly any similarity in the points of view between the two texts. The perspective of *Lanka's Princess* displays an allegiance towards the dominant notion that Surpanakha is a 'wrongdoer' in different ways, the greatest of which is being instrumental in the war between Ram and

Ravan that destroyed Lanka. The plot is narrated from Surpanakha's perspective but it shows a conflicted Surpanakha who is both wronged and who herself does wrong and later seeks redemption from Krishna in her next life. Kane's Surpanakha is initially wronged by her family and later by Ram and Lakshman. The point of view of the text directs at Ravan and Ram, both as offenders to Surpanakha in two different ways. Ravan is responsible for killing her husband, and Ram is responsible for killing her son and later her mutilation. The plot is designed to ascribe Surpanakha the responsibility for the war. Lanka is destroyed and her brothers are vanquished and killed. Later she comes to Ayodhya to fulfil her revenge on Ram and Lakshman. In Kane's text, Surpanakha desires Lakshman. She feels a deep love for him. Hence, she does not cause him any harm. But she plots against Ram and becomes instrumental in Sita's abandonment. However, in the end, she is left with remorse and self-criticism, "I don't want forgiveness; I cannot undo what I have done. No one can forgive me. Memories can make monsters too" (Kane 293).

Neelakantan's text exhibits a completely different interpretation of Meenakshi's character. In his text, Meenakshi is the defeated, mutilated princess of Lanka who leads a life of a street dweller in Ayodhya, yet she retains her dignity. In Kane's narrative, Ravan appears as an offender. It is Surpanakha alone who fights against all the perpetrators. Neelakantan portrays Meenakshi as 'Ravan's sister'. She asserts the superiority of her brother. Her memory brings back her brother's glory and Ram's unfairness, "Her brother had turned into black smoke and vanished into thin air many years ago. Now the queen's husband had no more enemies to fight, no more demons to vanquish, except perhaps the ones that lurked inside him" (Neelakantan 2012). Meenakshi's understanding of Ram as a man with an inner demon is immensely subversive. Her presence in Ayodhya on that day has a significance from the narrative point of view. Further, chandali's character adds to the transgression. The point of view of "Meenakshi" is different from *Lanka's Princess*, as it moves in the opposite narrative

direction. The difference in the points of view creates a significant difference between the two texts.

Comparison and Contrast between Characterizations

The difference in points of view in the texts reflects in the selection of characters as well the characterization of the protagonists. *Lanka's Princess* incorporates multiple characters and their viewpoints. Each character occupies a narrative space with their individual perspective. The readers encounter a plethora of different viewpoints which are often in contradiction with each other. Kaikesi's sentiment about protecting Lanka from her step son Kuber is in conflict with Vishravas' emotions. Again, Ravan has animosity with multiple characters including Surpanakha. Surpanakha herself is conflicted regarding her feelings for Lakshman. Both Ram and Lakshman are perpetrators, yet she develops romantic feelings towards the latter. The multifaceted characterization makes the plot intriguing and inclusive. Surpanakha occupies the most prominent narrative space. She is wronged, deprived of love, revenge-seeking, yet a fierce fighter. She fights against every injustice that she encountered in life. However, at the end, she regrets her way of life.

Meenakshi in "Meenakshi" does not regret her life. She craves for emotional bonding yet does not ponder over her suffering. She stoically accepts her condition. She relives her days in Lanka and her memory becomes her sole companion to combat the physical and emotional trauma that Ram inflicted on her. Like *Lanka's Princess*, in this text too, Meenakshi desires Lakshman. But she accepts her life with the rejection and mutilation. Further, chandali's character significantly adds to the representation of Meenakshi's story. And finally, it is the graceful Sita who even after being abandoned does not lose her dignity. Before leaving Ayodhya, she acknowledges her husband's inglorious acts. She seeks motivation from Meenakshi and chooses to subtly renounce Ram, "Meenakshi, if I had not seen you, I would have lived my life cursing my fate and feeling bitterness towards my husband, now I see hope.

He cannot hurt me. No one can hurt me" (Neelakantan 221) says Sita. While Kane incorporates complexities in Surpanakha's character, Neelakantan maintains a forthright subversive tone in representing Meenakshi. However, in spite of the differences in interpretation and portrayal, Surpanakha's tale emerges as a tale of resilience in both the narratives.

Apart from the representations of the three characters discussed so far, the scope of comparison is also present between the representations of Manthara's character in Kane's *Sita's Sister* and Neelakantan's "Manthara". The way Neelakantan approaches the reimagination of Manthara's character is contrary to the way Manthara is represented in Kane's text. The primary difference relates to the narrative scope of her character in the plot of the two texts. Manthara is the protagonist of Neelakantan's story; hence, the plot of the story revolves around her. In Kane's text, the scope of her narrative presence is limited since the focus of this text is on Urmila. Kane subscribes to the dominant perception of Manthara's character. She is represented as the evil old nursemaid of Kaikeyi's who plotted against Ram to create an opportunity for Bharat to ascend the throne of Ayodhya after Dasharath. Kane represents Manthara as a fundamentally scheming woman. Not only does she instigate Kaikeyi to compel Dasharath to banish Ram but also attempts to create a rift among the four sisters Sita, Urmila, Mandavi, and Shrutakirti who were the co-sisters in the royal family. Manthara partially succeeds in her plan when Ram leaves for exile. But she fails to succeed completely as Bharat refuses to ascend the throne. Manthara is finally put on solitary confinement for the rest of her life. Apparently, Kane portrays Manthara according to the popular image of her character. However, this apparently popular perception about Manthara's character gets a twist with two narrated events which transgress the popular notion. One, Kane assigns Manthara a scope to explain her motive, which is nothing apart from securing Kaikeyi's position in the kingdom. If Bharat becomes the king, Kaikeyi would enjoy the status of queen-mother and this idea motivated Manthara to ensure Ram's banishment from the kingdom. The other one is more

transgressive in nature. Towards the end of the text, it is revealed that Kaikeyi forced Dasharath to banish Ram to save the Raghu dynasty from an age-old curse. Her actual intention was to protect Ram and the Raghu dynasty from being destroyed. Manthara was clearly not aware of this. On being enquired by Urmila, Kaikeyi reveals the truth, "But she was playing her own game, parallel to mine but both overlapped at the occasion of Ram's coronation. I had to stop it and Manthara, by bringing up the two boons, helped me out inadvertently" (Kane 255). Hence it becomes evident that it was all Kaikeyi's design and decision. By this narrative twist, Kane deprives Manthara of her narrative role, however adverse it might be, to appear as a significant character in the Ramayan narrative.

Neelakantan positions Manthara at the centre of his text. Compared to Kane, he assigns a larger narrative presence to Manthara's character. The plot narrates her story. The episode of Ramayan that concerns Manthara is re-viewed through Manthara's lens. "Manthara" subverts her dominant portrayal. She is re-imaged as a mother to the little princess Kaikeyi who was deprived of maternal love. She is represented as an affectionate mother figure who ensures that her daughter's rights are protected. There is a stark difference in the points of view manifested in the two texts regarding Manthara's motive behind her action. While Kane re-presents her as a scheming disgraceful character, Neelakantan represents her as a protective mother who attempts fiercely to ensure justice to her daughter.

Comparative analysis between different texts involves an examination of the similarities and differences that exist between the respective texts. The primary focus of this chapter has been to study the portrayal of same character in two different texts. The authors are contemporary, yet, their perception of the epic characters differ. This factor reflects the quality of diversity that is inherent in the discourse of mythic narratives in India. Authors can approach any epic character and/or events and can appropriate those according to their perception.

Apart from the narratological components of plot, point of view, and characterization, the difference in authorial perception can also be analysed in the context of David Herman's idea of cognitive narratology. One of the tenets of cognitive narratology is to study how readers perception of a text impacts the respective text's representation. An author of a mythic narrative is also a reader who has perceived the epic in their own way, according to their cognition. Hence, the reflection of that cognition creates a difference in representation of an epic character when compared to another author who reimagines the same character. However, the characterizations have differences as well as similarities. Satyavati's story remains to be a story of ambition and quest for identity in both Kane and Madhavan's texts. Amba emerges to be the wronged, revenge-seeking, and suffering character in Komarraju and Madhavan's re-presentation. And, Surpanakha's tale is ultimately the tale of resilience as narrated in both Kane and Neelakantan's interpretations.

Chapter 6

6.1 Overview

This chapter explores the idea of storyworld, an aspect of cognitive narratology, as a continuation from the preceding chapter. The concept of storyworld explores how readers perceive a text and further represent that. This concept appears significant to this study as this research focuses on how age-old stories have been approached by different authors and novel interpretations of those stories are presented. Apart from the concept of storyworld, this chapter includes the findings of the research and discussion. The observations made, encompass selected narratological components and their application to understand the primary texts, and the perspectives of the characters that have been represented in the texts. Further, it includes the specific contributions of the research and the future scope of work.

6.2 Interpretation of epic tales and the concept of storyworld

This thesis aimed at critically examining how the selected female characters from Ramayan and Mahabharat have been reimagined in the primary texts. Adopting the theory of narratology, this research has analysed how the perspectives of these characters can substantially create a scope to alter the prevalent perceptions about them. The authors selected for the study have reimaged and reimagined these characters primarily by assigning them significant narrative agency within the texts. Further, apart from the protagonists, the selected texts also exhibit significant narrative presence of minor characters who are closely associated with the protagonists. This significant narrative presence too is directly connected to the narrative agency that they exercise in the respective texts. Narrative agency is the key narrative feature that determine the narrative status of the ‘dominant’ and ‘peripheral’ characters. A respective character’s narrative agency within a particular text determines their status, i.e. whether they are to be identified as a ‘dominant’ character or a ‘peripheral’ one. The interesting aspect of the characters selected for the present study is the discrepancy between their narrative

significance and the scope of their representation. These characters have significant narrative roles to play in the storyline of the epics.

Urmila's role as the elder princess of Mithila has been explicitly ignored in the dominant Ramayan tellings. Manthara's character has a key role to play that demonstrates her as an antagonist to Ram. However, her part of the story is largely ignored. Similarly, Surpanakha's perspective on her situation has been largely overlooked in spite of she having a key role to play in the epic conflict between Ram and Ravan. Shanta's character, as the eldest child of Dasharath has been completely omitted from the narrative sphere of Valmiki's Ramayan. Satyavati has a pivotal role to lay in the progression of the Kuru clan by deciding on the niyoga union between her son Krishna Dwaipayan and her widow daughter-in-law, Ambika and Ambalika. Yet, she has a limited narrative scope in the dominant tellings of Mahabharat. Similarly, Amba's encounter with Bhishma has a deep and long-term impact of the turn of events in the epic. However, Amba is not even assigned a voice of her own to narrate her story. Out of the sixty-seven upakhyanas or subtales that are there in Vyasa Mahabharat, one is Amba-upakhyana. In Amba-upakhyana, Bhishma is the narrator of Amba's tale. This displays the lack of narrative agency that Amba's character has in the dominant tellings.

The texts selected for the present study alters the narrative scope of these characters by assigning them pivotal narrative agency. This shift in narrative scope reflects the respective author's individual approach towards a character. In the context of writing mythic narratives, the choice of characters and the altered perspective of narrative scope and agency further reflects the author's reception of the traditional epic stories, and their interpretation of it on the basis of their cognition. This cognition creates a storyworld that often deviates from the dominant perspectives and perceptions. One of the prominent trends in narratology, over the past two decades, is to analyse **why** and **how** the stories are being told and read, instead of concentrating only on **what** is being told in a story. In this context, Herman postulates the

concept of storyworld. Storyworld, the idea propagated by Herman, emerges as a significant narrative component in the domain of cognitive narratology. A narrative, irrespective of being a fiction or a non-fiction, creates a mental model in the minds of the readers. The readers receive a narrative and create a world at the cognitive level. The interpretation of a particular narrative largely depends on this mental model that is created. Herman, in his book, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*, outlines the definition of storyworld and its function in narrative analysis. In this book, Herman attempts to locate the significance of cognitive science in the context of studying narratology.

Herman proposes that the scope of cognitive narratology expands across media. He suggests that cognitive narratology can be understood as the study of mind-relevant aspects of that are involved in the practice of storytelling. Not only the written expression of narratives, but different other media of storytelling, like, face to face interaction, radio and television broadcast, newspaper reports, virtual medium, and so on and so forth come under the purview of cognitive narratology. Again, 'mind-relevance' can be studied in terms of the diverse factors that are linked with designing and interpreting narratives, be it by the storyteller or the recipients of that narrative (readers and audience). 'Mind-relevance' additionally includes the multiple cognitive activities that are associated with the production of stories, like, conceptualizing a story, the artifacts of designing one, narrative representation, character development etc. which are essential for the formulation of a narrative. These factors also lead the recipients of the stories to interpret them. Herman, further suggests, "In addition, the mind-narrative nexus can be studied along two other dimensions, insofar as stories function as both (a) a target of interpretation and (b) a means of making sense of experience – a resource for structuring and comprehending the world in their own right" (Herman 30). The core idea of cognitive narratology is, thus, to locate and investigate how mental cognition contributes in creating as well as interpreting a narrative, and it is transmedial in nature.

Herman posits that the story recipients, on receiving a story reconstruct the same mentally, which eventually might also reflect in a reproduction. This reconstruction happens on the basis of how the recipients interpret the plot, characters and their roles, actions, and events. This particular aspect appears vital to the present research since this study essentially focuses on interpretation of the Indian epics. The research investigates how different characters, and respective episodes associated with them, in the epics, Ramayan and Mahabharat, get revisited, reinterpreted, and eventually represented in select contemporary Indian English mythic fiction. The respective authors of these contemporary texts emerge as potential recipients of the age-old epic narratives and have cognitively processed those. They have interpreted their areas of interests and have approached the dominant tellings of the epics from a different dimension. They have portrayed different lesser heard or misunderstood characters in a new light. This reflects the cognitive process that was in play while they interpreted the epics. Eventually, once their stories are produced and published, the readers become the recipients who again interpret these stories according to their mental cognition. This process continues which potentially leads towards further interpretation of age-old stories.

Apart from cognitive narratology, there is another prominent aspect of postclassical narratology, examined by Monika Fludernik, that contributes to the understanding of contemporary readers' engagement with the contemporary mythic fiction. Postclassical narratologist, Monika Fludernik, in her book – *An Introduction to Narratology* highlights that, factors like production of a text, its publication, distribution, reception – have been largely remained ignored in the domain of classical narratology. Fludernik refers to these factors as 'sociological aspects', and suggests that these aspects play a vital role in contributing to the contextual features of a text. Over the past two decades, there has been a resurgence of mythic writings in India. Mythic fiction written by different authors have been bestsellers, and have drawn immense attention of the readers. Factors like, easy accessibility of texts, connectivity with contemporary authors over social media, and marketing strategies by the publishers and distributers together contribute to the engagement that the readers have with the contemporary

mythic narratives. Further, the novel perspectives of approaching the traditional mythic stories, and exploration of less explored characters have generated immense interest among young adult readers.

6.3 Observations and discussion

The observations made in course of the research are presented here –

Lack of familial love

All the six characters that have been chosen for this research display deprivation of familial love. In *Sita's Sister*, Urmila constantly craves for the love that she deserved, both from her parents and her husband. "Urmila has the ability to analyse and overcome her own self and shows an ability to be aware of her emotions and work on them" (Beena 151). Shanta is an embodiment of the social and familial malice of preference of a son over a daughter. Most importantly, she is deprived of filial love and this deprivation causes major emotional setback to her. Surpanakha's tale, from an altered perspective, is inherently a tale of love deprivation and rejection. In Kane's *Lanka's Princess*, Surpanakha is the unwanted girl child of the asura family who later gets widowed by her own brother, Ravan. Further later in life, she is rejected and mutilated by Lakshman. Kane represents Surpanakha's character across three births, and in every birth, she is depicted as deprived of love. Manthara is quintessentially a disrespected character. Neelakantan, in "Manthara" reinterprets Manthara's tale and depicts that all her actions were motivated by her craving for love and to protect the love she got from Kaikeyi. Similar to Surpanakha and Manthara, Amba, in Mahabharat, is essentially a love deprived character. Both, Komarraju's "Priestess" and Madhavan's *The One Who Had Two Lives* represent this angle and connect it to her urge to seek revenge. Satyavati also goes through the same plight. Being rejected at birth, she nurtured a fierce ambition to subvert that rejection

which shapes her entire life. This is well represented in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* by Kane, and *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* by Madhavan.

Personal and/or social abandonment

Being deprived of familial love and rejected by the family leads to a sense of abandonment which is suffered by these characters. Urmila is abandoned by Lakshman when Lakshman decides to accompany Ram and Sita to the fourteen-year long exile. Shanta also faces a similar predicament of personal abandonment when she is given away for adoption to the kingdom of Anga. Amba suffers personal abandonment from Salva, Bhishma, and her father. In *The One Who Had Two Lives*, Madhavan also alludes to an abandonment that Amba faced from her mother, and eventually from her sisters. These characters suffer primarily from personal abandonment, while the other three characters – Satyavati, Surpanakha, and Manthara combat both personal as well as social abandonment. Being rejected by her biological father at birth, Satyavati is reared by the chieftain of a fishing community. Later, once her ambition of becoming a queen is fulfilled and she enters the royal premise, she faces severe resistance from the subjects and citizens of Hastinapur. This aspect has been elaborately represented in Kane's *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Satyavati is constantly looked down upon because she belongs to the fishing community and hence should be assigned an inferior place. However, Satyavati resiliently combats this resistance and secures a place for herself. Surpanakha's characterization in "Meenakshi" displays a similar aspect of social abandonment. Her character appears as a destitute in the streets of Ayodhya who is deprived of a claim to a dignified life. Yet, she thrives through her situation and combats the abandonment she is subjected to. Manthara's personal and social abandonment is primarily connected to her corporeal features. Yet, she surpasses that situation once her life gets associated with Kaikeyi's life only to be abandoned yet again by Kaikeyi later in her life.

Quest for identity

Quest for an individual identity is a prominent narrative trait that is prevalent in all the six characters. According to Greimas' idea of Object in his actantial model, 'identity' emerges to be the Object that every character craves for. The rejection and abandonment that they are subjected to emerge as the primary motivation behind the quest for attaining an individual identity. Urmila has been subjected to an identity crisis since her birth as Sita was bestowed with the identity of 'Maithili', the princess of Mithila, while ideally Urmila should have been assigned that identity. Hence, Urmila strives to build and establish an identity for herself. "Urmila's journey from Mithila to Ayodhya is in fact an allegorical and tenacious search for an individual identity aimed at going beyond being merely Sita's sister or Lakshman's wife" (Beena 149). In Ayodhya, Urmila assumes the role of a guardian to the royal family as well as to the throne after the family falls apart post Ram's departure to the exile. Apart from developing an identity for the external world, she also focuses on her personal growth. "Kane's Urmila is represented as a woman of many dimensions: she is a scholar, an artist, and most importantly a woman who is a pivot, holding everyone together" (Beena 149). Like Urmila, Shanta's character in "Shanta" also embarks on a journey to find an identity for herself. The identity that was denied to her as the princess and as the sole heir to the throne of Ayodhya, was given back to her in Anga. Further, after marrying Rishyasringa, she discovers the bliss of selflessness. Shanta's character is an embodiment of transition between an individual's quest for identity and one's social commitment. She and her husband dedicated their lives to the betterment of the people around them by offering them help and affection. Thus, Shanta attains an elevated identity than that of being a mere princess. In *Lanka's Princess*, Surpanakha's character displays a relentless quest for identity. The rejection she encountered from her family reflects in the vengeful characteristic feature which is associated with her character. "Her mutilation defines her identity as the "other" who faces agonising emotional mutilation

multiple times long before her physical mutilation" (Beena 88). Both the emotional mutilation that she was subjected to from her family, and the physical mutilation inflicted by Ram and Lakshman destroy her self-esteem and hence Surpanakha craves revenge which finally shapes her identity. In "Meenakshi" Surpanakha is not depicted as a revenge seeking, fierce character. Yet, her desire to retain her identity of a princess is visible. In her conversation with chandali, she repeatedly refers to Lanka, Ravan, and the war between Ram and Ravan that devastated Lanka. These narrative elements collectively reiterate her identity as the princess of Lanka. Even at an old age, with a mutilated body, and as a destitute, Surpanakha retains her dignity in her thoughts and actions and reclaims the identity of a princess. Manthara's depiction in "Manthara" explicitly displays an eternal quest for identity. The transition from the ugliest street dweller of Kaikeya to the foster mother of the royal children offers her a new identity. Eventually, being Kaikeyi's 'mother' becomes the sole purpose of her life. The motivation to fulfil the responsibilities associated with this identity is reflexive of her actions which finally robbed that identity from her. Being deprived of the identity of a princess, Satyavati's quest for the royal identity shapes her character. In both, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* and *The One Who Swam with the Fishes*, the narrative's focal point is Satyavati's fierce quest to attain the royal identity that she was denied at her birth. However, the teenager Matsyagandhi in *The One Who Swam with the Fishes* concentrates solely on becoming the queen, and Satyavati in *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* retains her fisher girl's identity and also aims to become the queen. "Satyavati is the representation of a strong female agency through which she transforms not just her life but also that of her entire settlement" (Beena 180). The aspect of Satyavati's identity in Kane's text oscillates between her craving for a royal identity and her reaffirmation of her marginalised social identity.

Exploration of emotional experiences

The emotional turmoil that results from being rejected and abandoned is the primary motivation behind these characters' urge to seek an independent identity for themselves. These texts explore the characters' psyche and emotional experiences that are at play in shaping their inner world. The narratological component of point of view plays a crucial role in analysing this narrative aspect of tracing a character's inner thoughts. The concept of zero focalisation, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, essentially contributes to understand the thoughts of a character. One of the primary concerns of narratology is the analysis of **who sees** and **who says**. In these texts, the authors have explored the inner thoughts that motivated a respective character to act the way they did. Urmila's conflicted mind about the responsibilities she had and the position she was assigned to in the family, Shanta's emotional turmoil, Surpanakha, Manthara, and Satyavati's struggle to establish an identity for themselves, Amba's craving for love and her fierce urge to seek revenge - all these emotional aspects majorly contribute to the understanding of these character.

Focus on minor and peripheral characters

A pivotal commonality that permeates the chosen texts is the prominent narrative presence of unheard, minor, and peripheral characters. Each text offers a significant narrative space, and assigns substantial narrative agency to characters who have largely remained unnoticed and unexplored in the dominant representations of the epics. These peripheral characters perform the function of the Helper according to Greimas' actantial model. *Sita's Sister* extensively accommodates voices of such characters. Apart from the protagonist, Urmila, characters like Mandavi and Shrutakirti, Sunaina, Kaushalya, and Sumitra have been assigned significant narrative roles. Among the princesses of Mithila, Sita is unequivocally the most prominent one. Urmila also has some narrative presence. Bharat's wife Mandavi and Shatrughna's wife Shrutakirti are cousins to Sita and Urmila. Their narrative presence in

popular representations is negligible. Sunaina, the queen of Mithila too is a peripheral character. While Kaikeyi is well known among the three wives of Dasharath, Kaushalya and Sumitra are largely ignored. In *Sita's Sister*, these characters contribute to the plot development. Their perspectives on the epic episodes that concern them is represented in this text. Similarly in *Lanka's Princess*, Kane includes a vast array of characters and their perspectives. Taraka, Kaikesi, Vishravas, Kumbhakarna, Mandodari, Vibhishan's wife, Sarama all these characters' points of view significantly contribute to the progression of the plot and add a novel dimension to the understanding of Ramayan. The voices of Taraka, Kaikesi and other asuras display an alternative perspective which challenges the Ram-centric reading of Ramayan. In "Meenakshi", chandali's character is a multidimensional narrative agent. She engages with Surpanakha in a dialogue which emerges as a commentary on the 'ideal' kingdom and its ruler. Further, her character represents the plight of a woman sustaining an abusive marriage and being the mother of two daughters. She also exemplifies resilience and transgression. After meeting Sita, chandali takes control of her situation, ignores her husband, and names her younger daughter Sita. Similarly, in "Manthara", Bhairava's character plays a multidimensional role. He is an ordinary soldier in Kaikeya who is entrusted by the king to find the 'ugliest' woman in the kingdom. Bhairava finds Manthara. He overlooks Manthara's physical features and falls in love with her. He promises to remain loyal to her forever. Manthara, in her pride of being the foster mother to the royal children, ignores him. However, at the end of the story, it is Bhairava who stays with Manthara as he promised. Further, Bhairava's character also appears as a medium to question the necessity of a war. He represents an ordinary soldier's perspective in a war situation and comments on the futility of wars. Dasharaj, Satyavati's adoptive father, had a significant role to play in negotiating with Shantanu, and later with Bhishma, about the rights of Satyavati's children. Madhavan assigns this role of negotiator to Chiro (Chitravasu), Satyavati's adoptive brother. The young boy

confronts Bheeshma in an unyielding manner to secure his sister's rights. Chiro, a young fisher boy's encounter with the Bheeshma, the prince of Hastinapur, stands as a metaphor for the resistance of the marginalized against royalty. Similarly, the inclusion of Lalita's character in *The One Who Had Two Lives* adds intriguing dimension to Amba's story. These peripheral voices are independent voices whose presence adds meaning to the kernel of the narratives. The voices of these characters are closely related to the protagonists, yet they are not overshadowed by the protagonists' voice. These characters retain their individual, independent voice. The existence of these characters as significant narrative entities reflects inclusivity and attribute a polyphonic quality to the texts.

Dominant characters have a subsidiary narrative presence

Epics are stories of 'heroes'. Ramayan and Mahabharat are not any exception. The stories from Ramayan and Mahabharat are tales of illustrious and valorous heroes. These epics portray a 'larger than life' image of the male protagonists. The texts chosen for this research essentially assign subsidiary roles to the apparently dominant epic characters. *Sita's Sister*, "Shanta", "Manthara", "Meenakshi", *Lanka's Princess* – these tellings of Ramayan display negligible narrative presence of Ram. Similarly, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*, *The One Who Swam with the Fishes*, "Priestess", and *The One Who Had Two Lives* are Interpretations that exhibit a marginalised presence of the illustrious heroes of Mahabharat. The female epic characters, and some peripheral characters emerge having significant narrative presence in the larger spectrum of the Interpretations of these epics.

Conclusion

In *Mahabharata: The Epic and The Nation*, G.N. Devy writes about the significant impact Mahabharat has on the Indian socio-cultural and political milieu since time immemorial. He opines that India has witnessed changes of kingdoms and dynasties, emergence of religious

sects, evolution in forms of art and architecture and schools of philosophy. Yet Mahabharat has never lost its relevance. It remains ever contemporary. "However, the *Mahabharata* has never ceased to excite its audience and viewers. It has not ceased to offer every individual, time and again, opportunities to connect with it. It has also allowed individuals to dig in it and disagree with it on many points" (Devy 2). Similarly, Paula Richman in the introductory chapter of *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* writes, "Throughout Indian history many authors and performers have produced and many patrons have supported, diverse tellings of the Ramayana in numerous media" (Richman 4). The key idea refers to the notion of plurality and inclusiveness that is inherent in the epic discourse of India. It also suggests that the concept of diversity also includes narratives that deviate, oppose, challenge, and subvert the dominant epic representations. This research has concentrated on this notion of diversity and transgression. Through the lens of narratology, it has probed how the texts selected for the study add new outlook towards reading the traditional and popular tellings of the epics. The present research has examined how different narrative components, especially 'characters', contribute to a novel understanding of the epics. This study has sought to understand how the selected texts essentially plead for a more inclusive and flexible approach towards interpreting these characters and their relationship with their surroundings.

To conclude, the texts selected do not essentially glorify the protagonists. The interpretations do not claim that these characters are flawless. These mythic narratives depict tales of these female characters' triumphs and trials. The authors in these texts have attempted to assign a centre stage to these overshadowed characters, have given a narrative scope to their unheard voices. The grand epics are the stories of these characters as well. Disrupting the cursory presence that most of these female characters have in dominant and popular representations, these mythic narratives create a scope for their stories to be told. These texts offer a spotlight on their perspectives. Once these unheard stories are heard, these characters'

prevalent familiarity gets disrupted, and the age-old epic tales emerge with novel dimensions and fresh perspectives.

6.4 Specific contributions

The specific contributions of this research are listed below –

a. This research brings to clear focus the theoretical advantages gained by employing narratological approach in studying the specific texts. The research has examined the interpretations of Ramayan and Mahabharat with focus on selected characters. Employing the theoretical framework of narratology, it has examined how reimagination of certain characters can alter the perspective of reading dominant tellings of an epic. The theory of narratology appears significant in this context because the theory is effective in examining the perspectives of representation of a character, the choice of narrated events that complement that representation, and the narrative techniques adopted by an author.
b. This research has explored mythic interpretations by four contemporary authors. The authors display identifiable points of intersection in their literary vision. This intersection is even more prominent where two contemporary authors interpret one mythic character. The present study has looked into certain narrative patterns underlying the works of the selected authors, that can be identified in the primary texts.
c. As already mentioned, the approach towards reimagination and representation of epic characters exhibits the presence of a hierarchy of characters. Certain characters are highlighted more than the other characters. For instance, Sita and Draupadi are the most explored epic female characters in the context of the Indian epics. This research has focused on texts which reimagine less explored characters like Urmila, Shanta, and Manthara as their narrative representations are significantly limited in the domain of

mythic narrative writing. Further, the study has examined the narratological components – plot, point of view, character, temporality, and spatiality – that contribute to the reorganizing of the hierarchy of these characters in the context of their narrative scope in the epics.

d. This research has included discussion on the concepts of Indian narratology as well. There are certain features of mythic narratives that can be well interpreted through theoretical notions of Indian narratology. For example, the cyclical nature of myth. One of the key features of mythic narratives is the tenet of cyclicalisation. K. Ayyappa Paniker has analysed this feature of mythic stories and has used the term 'cyclicalisation' as one of the distinct features of Indian narratology. Referring to this particular feature in the context of storytelling in India, Paniker opines, "It also perhaps suggests that this is only one way of telling the tale so well-known to everybody that somebody else will recycle the same in a very different way" (Paniker,11). This research fundamentally focuses on recycling of a known story from a different perspective. Hence, a study of Indian narratology, as outlined by Paniker, has been essential to this research.

6.5 Future scope of the work

In *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin refers to Dostoevsky's narrative world and suggests that Dostoevsky's novels display a polyphonic world. "*A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels*" (Bakhtin 6). Bakhtin further posits that, "In the unity of a monologically perceived and understood world; there is no presumption of a plurality of equally-valid consciousness, each with its own world (Bakhtin 7). The texts chosen for this research disrupt the monologic narrative world by including

multiple peripheral voices and assigning them a significant narrative position. These peripheral voices are independent voices whose presence adds meaning to the kernel of the narratives. A critical reading of these texts as polyphonic texts based on Bakhtin's can be considered as an effective way to study these characters and their narrative positions in these texts further. The texts studied for this research are an integral part of Indian society and culture. Further research can be undertaken approaching these texts as cultural texts and examining how the contemporary audience and readers interact with these texts. Moreover, exploring the ways 'myth' works as a phenomenon in the selected texts in connection to the contemporary cultural environment can be considered as a future scope of work. The theoretical framework of Cultural Studies can be applied to that research. The interaction of different tellings and their readers also come under the purview of cognitive narratology. David Herman's theory of cognitive narratology is one of the pivotal trends in research in narratology and that theory is potentially applicable to studying mythic narratives. A brief introduction to the concept of cognitive narratology and its pertinence to the study of mythic narratives has been presented in this research. The theory of Subaltern Studies can be applied to further research on the selected texts and characters. These characters are marginalised in the domain of popular representations. Moreover, characters like Manthara and Satyavati also bear a 'subaltern' identity in terms of their social status. Interpreting the representations of these characters through the lens of Subaltern Studies can potentially direct towards new avenues of research. The theory of Myth Criticism can also be applied to these texts for further research.

References

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Alber, Jan and Monika Fludernik. "Introduction." *Postclassical Narratology*, edited by Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, Ohio University Press, 2010, pp. 1-31.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, edited by Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981.

---. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated and edited by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

---. "Epic and Novel." *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, edited by Michael J. Murphy and Patrick D. Hoffman, Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 43-60.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 4th ed., University of Toronto Press, 2017.

Barthes, Roland and Lionel Duisit. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative." *New Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 2, winter 1975, pp. 237-72.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Vintage, 2009.

Beena, G. *VISION and RE-VISION: Revisiting Mythologies, Rethinking Women*. Notion Press, 2019.

Bhyrappa, S. L. "Mahabharata: my attempt at a re-creation." *The Mahabharata Revisited*, edited by R. N. Dandekar, Sahitya Akademi, 2017, pp. 255-65.

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Brooks, Peter. "Reading the Plot." *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, edited by Michael J. Murphy and Patrick D. Hoffman, Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 201-20.

Chakraborty Dasgupta, Subha. "Narrative Representations of Landscape: Generic Specificities and their Transformation in History." *Studies in Comparative Literature: Theory, Culture and Space*, edited by Jancy James, et al., Creative Books, 2007, pp. 231-39.

Chatman, Seymour. "Towards a Theory of Narrative." *New Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 2, winter 1975, pp. 295-318. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/468421.

---. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Cornell University Press, 1978.

---. "Characters and Narrators: Filter, Center, Slant, and Interest-Focus." *Poetics Today*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1986, pp. 189-204. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1772758.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1997.

---. "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative." *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Cornell University Press, 2002, pp. 169-87.

---. *Structuralist Poetic: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. Routledge, 2004.

Dannenberg, Hilary P. *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction*. U of Nebraska Press, 2008.

Darby, David. "Form and Context: An Essay in the history of Narratology." *Poetics Today*, vol. 22, no. 4, winter 2001, pp. 829-52.

Das, G K. "Sarala Dasa's Mahabharata: A Supermyth." *Reflections and Variations on The Mahabharata*, edited by TRS Sharma, Sahitya Akademi, 2017, pp. 276-86.

Debroy, Bibek, translator. *The Mahabharata: Volume 1 (Sections 1 to 15)*. Penguin Random House India , 2015.

Devy, G.N. *Mahabharata: The Epic and the Nation*. Aleph Book Company, 2022.

Dogra, Sapna. "The Thirty-One Functions in Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale: An Outline and Recent Trends in the Applicability of the Proppian Taxonomic Model." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. IX, no. 2, 2017, pp. 410-19, rupkatha.com/V9/n2/v9n241.pdf.

Duvall, John N. "Using Greimas' Narrative Semiotics: Signification in Faulkner's "The Old People"." *College Literature*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1982, pp. 192-206. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25111481.

Erndl, Kathleen M. "The Mutilation of Surpanakha." *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, edited by Paula Richman, University of California Press, 1991, pp. 67-88.

Fludernik, Monika. "Histories of Narrative Theory (II): From Structuralism to the Present." *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 36-59.

---. *An Introduction to Narratology*. Translated by Patricia Hausler-Greenfield and Monika Fludernik, Routledge, 2009.

---. "Narratology in the Twenty-First Century: The Cognitive Approach to Narrative." *PMLA*, vol. 125, no.4, 2010, pp. 924-30. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/41058291.

Fludernik, Monika and Greta Olson. "Introduction." *Current Trends in Narratology*, edited by Greta Olson, De Gruyter, 2011, pp. 1-36.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. E-book ed., Rosetta Books LLC, 2002.

Gass, William H. "The Concept of Character in Fiction." *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, edited by Michael J. Murphy and Patrick D. Hoffman. Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 113-20.

Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cornell University Press, 1980.

---. "Voice." *Narratology: An Introduction*, edited by Susan Landa Garcia and Jose Angel Onega, Routledge, 1996, pp. 172-89.

Ghosh, Sujit K., editor. *Ramayana in the North-East India*. B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2002.

Greimas, A.J. *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*. Translated by Daniel McDowell, et.al, University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

Hall, Stuart. "The Work of Representation." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, SAGE Publications Ltd, 1997, pp. 13-74.

Herman, David. "Script, Sequences, and Stories: Elements of a Postclassical Narratology." *PMLA*, vol. 112, no. 5, 1997, pp. 1046-59. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/463482.

---. "Histories of Narrative Theory (I): A Genealogy of Early Developments." *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 19-35.

---. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Wiley Blackwell, 2009.

---. "Cognitive Narratology." *Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Huhn, et al, De Gruyter, 2009, pp. 30-43.

---. "Introduction." *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*, edited by David Herman, University of Nebraska Press, 2011, pp. 1-42.

---. "Story Logic in Conversational and Literary Narratives." *Narrative*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2011, pp. 130-7. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/20107238.

---. *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*. MIT Press, 2013.

Herman, David, et al., editors. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Routledge, 2005.

Herman, Luc and Bart Vervaeck. *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Translated by Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

Howard, Veena R. "Narrative of Amba in the Mahabharata: Female Body, Gender, and the Namesake of the Divine Feminine." *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Philosophy and Gender*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, pp. 217-50.

Jahn, Manfred. "Frames, Preferences, and the Reading of Third-person Narratives: Towards a Cognitive Narratology." *Poetics Today*, vol. 18, no. 4, winter 1997, pp. 441-68. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/1773182.

---. "Focalization." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by David Herman, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 94-108.

Jain, Jasbir. "Theorizing Resistance and Creativity." *Interdisciplinary Alter-Natives in Comparative Literature*, edited by E. V. Ramakrishnan, et al., SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2013, pp. 150-74.

Jani, A. N. "The Mahabharata as an organic growth of the oral literary tradition in ancient India." *The Mahabharata Revisited*, edited by R. N. Dandekar, Sahitya Akademi, 2017, pp. 71-85.

Kafaleons, Emma. "Functions after Propp: Words to Talk about How We Read Narrative." *Poetics Today*, vol. 18, no. 4, winter 1997, pp. 469-94.

Kamban. *The Kamba Ramayana*, translated by N.S. Jagannathan, edited by P. S. Sundaram, Penguin Random House India Pvt Ltd, 2002.

Kane, Kavita. *Sita's Sister*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd , 2014.

---. *Lanka's Princess*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2017.

---. *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty*. Westland publications Ltd, 2017.

Karve, Irawati. *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch*. Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2007.

Keen, Suzanne. *Narrative Form*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Komarraju, Sharath. "Priestess." *The Rise of Hastinapur*, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015, pp. 1-116.

Lal, Malashri, and Namita Gokhale, editors. *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*. Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd, 2009.

Leander, Niels Buch. "To Begin with the Beginnin: Birth, Origin, and Narrative Inception." *Narrative Beginnings: Theories and Practices*, edited by Brian Richardson, University of Nebraska Press, 2008, pp. 15-28.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. "The Structural Analysis of Myth." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 68, no. 270, 1995, pp. 428-44. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/536768.

Madhavan, Meenakshi Reddy. *The One Who Swam with the Fishes*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2017.

---. *The One Who Had Two Lives*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2018.

McAlpine, Lynn. "Why Might You Use Narrative Methodology? A Story About Narrative." *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri*, vol. 4, no. 1, Apr. 2016, pp. 32–57, doi:10.12697/eha.2016.4.1.02b.

McGrath, Kevin. *STRI: Feminine Power in the Mahabharata*. Orient BlackSwan Private Limited, 2011.

Narayan, R. K. *The Indian Epics Retold*. Penguin Random House India, 2000.

Neelakantan, Anand. *Shanta: The Story of Rama's Sister*.E-book ed., Westland Publications Ltd, 2017.

---. "Manthara." *Valmiki's Women*. Westland Publications Private Limited, 2021, pp. 66-166.

---. "Meenakshi." *Valmiki's Women*. Westland Publications Private Limited, 2021, pp. 208-23.

---. "Shanta." *Valmiki's Women*. Westland Publications Private Limited, 2021, pp. 23-65.

Paniker, Ayyappa. "Interiorization as as Literary Device." *Studies in Comparative Literature: Theory, Culture, and Space*, edited by Jancy James, et al., Creative Books, 2007, pp. 220-30.

Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Indian Mythology*. Simon and Schuster India, 2013.

---. *Shikhandi and Other Tales They Don't Tell You*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2014.

Phelan, James. *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*. University of Chicago Press, 1989.

---. *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative*. Ohio State University Press, 2007.

Prince, Gerald. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. De Gruyter Mouton, 1982.

---. "Narrative Analysis and Narratology." *New Literary History*, vol. 13, no. 2, winter 1982, pp. 179-88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/468908.

---. "On Narratology: Criteria, Corpus, Context." *Narrative*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1995, pp. 73-84, *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/20107044.

---. "A Commentary: Constants and Variables of Narratology." *Narrative*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2001, pp. 230-33. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20107252.

---. "Classical and/ or Postclassical Narratology." *L'Esprit Createur*, vol. 48, no. 2, summer 2008, pp. 115-23. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26289435.

Prince, Gerald and Arlene Noble. "Narratology, Narrative, and Meaning." *Poetics Today*, vol. 12, no. 3, autumn 1991, pp. 543-52. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1772650.

Propp, Vladimir Yakovlevich. *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., University of Texas Press, 1968.

Rajendran, C. *Narratology: Indian Perspective*. New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 2010.

Ramanujan, A. K. "Repitition in the Mahabharata." *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, edited by Vinay Dharwadker, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 161-83.

---. "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, edited by Paula Richman, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 22-49.

Richardson, Brian. "Authors, Narrators, Narration." *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, edited by David Herman, et al., Ohio State University Press, 2012, pp. 51-56.

Richman, Paula, editor. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Psychology Press, 2002.

Rudrum, David. "From Narrative Representation to Narrative Use: Towards the Limits of Definition." *Narrative*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2005, pp. 195-204.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Toward a definition of Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, edited by David Herman, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 22-35.

Ryan, Marie-Laure, et al. *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet*. Ohio State University Press, 2016.

Schleifer, Ronald and Alan Velie. "Genre and Structure: Toward an Actantial Typology of Narrative Genres and Modes." *MNL*, vol. 102, no. 5, 1997, pp. 1122-50. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2905314.

Schmid, Wofl. "Eventfulness and Repetitivenes: Two Aesthetics of Storytelling." *Emerging Vectors of Narratology*, edited by Per Krogh Hansen, et al., De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 229-46.

Schmid, Wolf. *Narratology: An Introduction*. De Gruyter, 2010.

Scholes, Robert, et al.. "Plot in Narrative." *The Nature of Narrative*. Fortieth anniversary ed., Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 207-39.

Shang, Biwu. "Plurality and Complementarity of Postclassical Narratologies." *Journal of Cambridge Studies*, vol. 6 no. 2-3, 2011, pp. 131-47.

Sharma, Nancy and Smita Jha. "Assertion or Transgression: A Critical Study of Surpanakha as an Unwelcomed Girl Child in Kavita Kane's Lanka's Princess." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2023, pp. 1-10.

Sharma, TRS. "Introduction: Many Makers, Many Texts/Contexts." *Refelections and Variations on The Mahabharata*. Sahitya Akademi, 2017, pp. 1-37.

Sinha, Kanad. *From Dasarajna to Kurukshetra*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

Sukthankar, V.S. *On the Meaning of Mahabharata*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1998.

Tharuvana, Azeez. *Living Ramayanas*. Translated by Oben Ebenezer S. Eka, 2021.

Todorov, Tzvetan and Arnold Weinster. "Structural Analysis of Narrative." *NOVEL: A Forum of Fiction*, vol. 3, no. 1, autumn 1969, pp. 70-76. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1345003.

Todorov, Tzvetan. “Meaning in Literature: A Survey.” *Poetics*, vol. 1, no. 1, Jan. 1971, pp. 8–15, doi:10.1016/0304-422x(71)90002-7.

Vanita, Ruth, and Saleem Kidwai. *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Vanita, Ruth. *The Dharma of Justice in the Sanskrit Epics*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Varughese, Dawson E. “Post-millennial ‘mythology-inspired fiction’ in English: the market, the genre, and the (global) reader.” *Indian Genre Fiction: Pasts and Future Histories*, edited by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, et al., First South Asia edtion, Routledge, 2019.

Wilkins, W. J. *Hindu Mythology*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2020.

Zoran, Gabriel. "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative." *Poetics Today*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1984, pp. 309-35. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1771935.

List of Publications

1. Chakraborti, Shruti and M.G. Prasuna. "Quest for Negotiation in a Postcolonial World – A Comparative Study of the Characterization of Antionette and Bertha." *Post-Colonial Praxis: Ramifications and Intricacies*, edited by Abhilash Kaushik and Dr. Merry Baruah, 2020, pp. 238-49.
2. Chakraborti, Shruti and M.G. Prasuna. "Mythic Interpretation: A Critical Study of Sarath Kommaraju's *The Queens of Hastinapur*." *Art & Aesthetics of Modern Mythopoeia: Literatures, Myths and Revisionism,* edited by Ritushree Sengupta and Ashish Kumar Gupta, Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, 2020.
3. Chakraborti, Shruti. "Elements of Transgression in *Yajnaseni*: *The Story of Draupadi*: A Critical Study." *Literary Oracle,* vol. 3, no. 1&2, 2020, pp. 83-92.
4. Chakraborti, Shruti and M.G. Prasuna. "Remapping Trauma in Mythic Narratives: A Study of Surpanakha's Story." *Drishti: the Sight,* vol. IX, no. II, 2021, pp. 11-15.
5. Chakraborti, Shruti. "Subverting Patriarchal Interpretation of the Ramayan through a Feminist Lens: A Critical Study of *Sita's Ramayana*." *Journal of International Women's Studies,* vol. 24, no. 2, 2022. (Scopus indexed)

List of Presentations

1. Presented a paper titled "A Critical Analysis of Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana*" at the national conference on *Innovations in Teaching ESL and Literature: The Present and the Future (ITESLLPF)* organised by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Warangal, 30 September - 1 October, 2019.
2. Presented a paper titled "Choice, Consent and the Kuru Queen: A Critical Study of Aditi Banerjee's *The Curse of Gandhari*" at the international conference on *Social consciousness and Progression in English Language Literature (IC-SPELL 2020)* organised by the PG and Research Department of English, Sri Vidya Mandir Arts and Science College, Tamilnadu, 28 - 29 February, 2020.
3. Presented a paper titled "Remapping Female Quest and Desire from a Socio-Cultural Perspective – A Study of *The Kaunteyas*" at the international web-conference *Rethinking Humanities and its Entanglements* organised by Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Kolkata, 3-5 August, 2020.
4. Presented a paper titled "Exploring Sita's Portrayal: Reimagination, Interpretation, and Revision of Ramayana" at the *12th Annual Debrupa Bal Memorial National Students' Seminar* organised by the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 26-28 November, 2020.
5. Presented a paper titled "Revisiting *Kathasaritsagar* through Select English Translations: A Critical Study" at national e-conference on *World Classics in English Translation: A Critical Perspective* organised by the Department of English, Sri S. Ramaswamy Naidu Memorial College, Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 6 February, 2021.
6. Presented a paper titled "Exploring an Animated Narrative as a Tool of Subversion: A Critical Study of *Sita Sings the Blues*" at Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (SICI) golden jubilee international conference *Electronic Textual Cultures: A study of Digital Literature and Literature in Digital Spaces* organised by the Department of Indian and World Literatures, The English and Foreign Languages University Hyderabad, 9-12 March, 2021.
7. Presented a paper titled "Negotiating Ideology through Narratology in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*" at the e-conference on *Postcolonial Narratives: Theorizations and Transformations* organised by the Department of English and Social Sciences, IIT Patna, 12 March, 2021.

8. Presented a paper titled "Revisionist Retelling of Ramayana – A Comparative Study of Sita's Representation by Select Women Authors" at the *International Virtual Conference on Gender Studies and Women Empowerment* organised by the Department of Management, Humanities & Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Agartala, 18 April, 2021.
9. Presented a paper titled "Interrogating Identity in Alternative Narrative: A Study of *Krishna's Sister*" at the national conference on *Contemporary Perspectives in English Language, Literature, & Cultural Studies (NCCPE-2021)* organised by University Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities in collaboration with Rupkatha journal in Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, and Literary Voice, 11-12 June, 2021.
10. Presented a paper titled "Transcending Boundaries and Voicing the Other: A Critical Study of *Parva* Duology by Amruta Patil" at the virtual conference *Decolonising the Panel, Deconstructing the Gutter* organised by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT-Patna, 25-26 September, 2021.
11. Presented a paper titled "Re-presenting Characters, Re-mapping Identity: A Narratological Study of Anand Neelakantan's *Valmiki's Women*" at the *International Conference on Multidisciplinary Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities* organised by the Department of Arts, SHSS, Manipal University, Jaipur, 2-4 March, 2022.
12. Presented a paper titled "Re-presentation of Select Mythological Characters from Mahabharat: A Comparative Study" at *The Interdisciplinary International Conference on Mahabharata Epic Across Asia: Ancient Indian Knowledge System Transcending Spatio-Temporal Boundaries* organised by the Department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University Hyderabad, Sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), 29-31 May, 2023.
13. Presented a paper titled "Tales of Endurance and Resilience: A Critical Study of Re-Presentation of Kunti in Select Indian English Mythic Narratives" at the international conference on *Mapping the Marvelous: Mythopoeia, Multiverse & Fantasy Across Literature(s), Films and Media* organised by the Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, 19-21 December, 2023.

Biography of the Candidate

Shruti Chakraborty is a doctoral research scholar in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus. Her research interest focuses on contemporary Indian English mythic fiction. She has obtained her postgraduation degree in English literature (M.A. English) from University of Calcutta. She has completed PGCTE and PGDTE from The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She has also qualified the UGC-NET. As part of her doctoral study, Shruti has published in peer-reviewed and indexed national and international journals. She has also attended and presented papers in various prestigious conferences.

Contact Details:

Email: p20170105@hyderabad.bits-pilani.ac.in

shrutichakraborti@gmail.com

Mobile: 9989563452

Biography of the Supervisor

M.G. Prasuna is Professor and former Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at BITS Pilani, Hyderabad campus. Her Ph.D. is in the area of Comparative Literature. Her research interest includes Comparative Literature, Diaspora Literature, Minority Literature, Regional Literature and Post-Colonial Literature. She has published widely in peer-reviewed and indexed national and international journals. Prof. Prasuna has travelled across India and to several countries abroad to present papers at prestigious literary conferences.

Contact Details:

Email: prasuna@hyderabad.bits-pilani.ac.in

Mobile: 9848532203