

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to initiate a selective reading of the characters from *The Mahabharata*, using an alternative, deconstructivist approach to situate the ‘other’ in this epic. The work focuses on characters who exist in marginal boundaries as well as in liminality, and hence, on the threshold of condemnation/celebration. Characters like Draupadi, Kunti, Renuka, Ulupi and Hidimba are analysed within an anti-patriarchal, non-normative framework, while characters like Shikhandi, Yuvanashwa and Bhangashwan are placed in conversation involving queer space, marginalization and resistance. Drawing heavily from the feminist, deconstructivist and queer theories, the thesis analyses how the gendered marginals fought for their lost agency and reclaimed their voices by subverting the hegemonic power relationships. To achieve this, besides the primary text, the thesis also delves deep into alternative readings of the Indic myths and demonstrates myriad forms of resistance by the afore-mentioned characters. This study is significant in the way it foregrounds the scope of celebrating the marginals through their resilience and assertion. Thus, it unfolds a saga of reclaiming agency through the subversion of the normative, orthodox societal dicta, and recognizes the empowerment achieved by the gendered subaltern in the process.

Keywords: Subaltern, hegemonic, marginalization, alternative reading, agency, resistance, feminist discourse, queer space.

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PROLOGUE

KUNTI

Standing on the banks of the river Ashwa
A young mother wept in helplessness
Her new-born adrift in the swirling waters
The dark current bearing
The rickety wicker - basket away
Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas
Who could seek and beget three sons
From Dharma, Vayu and Indra at Pandu's behest
Could not keep one of her own
Conceived before marriage
Her femininity restrained
By the manacles of
Motherhood sanctioned by Patriarchy
Kunti could not celebrate
The victory of the Pandavas
Regretting the androcentric compulsion of war
Passed on to women like rabies
She retired to the forest to end her life
In the forest fire when others were fleeing
Kunti walked towards the blaze
Her guilt pursuing her
Like a dark shroud



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