

**Study of Suppressed Characters in Indian Mythic Fiction: A
Subaltern Perspective**

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Abstract:

Indian mythic fiction is a relatively recent addition to the realm of Indian English literature. The primary content of this work consists of the characters and narratives derived from the two significant Indian epics, namely the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Typically, it encompasses contemporary adaptations of these metanarratives. It can be argued that they represent a contemporary reinterpretation of conventional values. Numerous writers have chosen this genre as a domain for their literary pursuits. They have carried out their responsibilities admirably. Contemporary authors who have contributed to the genre of Indian mythic fiction include Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane, Chitra Banerjee Divakarni, Anand Neelakantan, Mallar Chatterjee, Manini J. Anandani, and Amish Tripathi. The authors have captivated the literary audience by skillfully portraying lesser-known yet impactful characters from the aforementioned epics. This study has identified four significant characters from the subaltern perspective, two of which are from the Ramayana and the other two from the Mahabharata. Despite being suppressed, these characters hold great importance.

Keywords: subaltern, contemporary, reinterpretation, conventional values.

A subaltern refers to an individual who experiences oppression, dispossession, and marginalization and lacks the ability to express their ideas. Indian mythic fiction has taken the place of Indian mythological narratives and their characters in the contemporary scenario. Several authors, including Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane, and Anand Neelakantan, have chosen Indian mythic fiction as their primary area of writing. The primary focus of their work pertains to characters predominantly derived from epic literature. The literary works of the author have notably provided a platform for the expression of marginalized personalities within the context of Indian mythology.

This paper has selected four such personas. The characters chosen for study are Ravana and Shurpanaka from the Ramayana and Shakuni and Draupadi from the Mahabharata, who may be classified as subalterns due to their marginalized status.

According to the Hindu epic Ramayana, Ravana was regarded as the monarch of Lanka. He was born to Sage Visravas and was the great-grandson of Brahma. Ravana's maternal lineage can be traced back to the esteemed Brahmarakshas Princess Kaikesi. He exhibited a strong adherence to the worship of Lord Shiva. He possessed exceptional scholarly abilities, demonstrated effective leadership qualities, exhibited mastery in playing the Veena, and had a strong desire to surpass the Devas.

Ravana also demonstrated expertise in the fields of Siddha and political science. He received a divine blessing from Brahma, which resulted in him accumulating the ambrosia of eternal life in his abdomen. Ravana held his clan in high esteem. Rama suffered emotional distress as a result of losing his beloved because Ravana kidnapped Sita in response to Ram and Lakshman's insult to Shurpanaka.

He belonged to the Asura tribe, a group that the caste system has marginalized, and despite having significant abilities, he continued to hold a subordinate position. The voice of this group has been historically disregarded and undervalued over an extended period of time. Anand Neelakantan's work, *Asura: The Tale of the Vanquished*, presents a narrative from Ravana's point of view. The author has given vocal expression to Ravana and also to one of the insignificant characters, Bhadra, in this work.

The author has made the reading interesting by providing an alternate narrative of Ravana and Bhadra in each chapter. The readers come to understand a lot of unheard information about the Asura tribe and the reason for their suppression. Also, they could comprehend that without the character Ravana, the Ramayana narrative could not have been possible.

Meenakshi, who was born with eyes resembling the shape of a fish, was the daughter of the esteemed sage Visrava and the asura princess Kaikesi and also the sister of Ravana, a well-known figure in mythology. She was known to the world only as Shurpanaka due to her possession of sharp, claw-like nails.

She had a difficult upbringing as a child because her mother disliked her because she thought she wasn't attractive and because her male siblings overshadowed her. She chose Prince Vidyutjivah of the Danvas clan as her spouse. But Ravana was not happy about this because of the longstanding animosity between the Rakshas and Danvas. However, owing to the intervention of Mandodhari, Ravana accepted their matrimonial union.

Vidyutjivah launched an aggressive attack on Ravana, prompting Ravana to defend himself, resulting in the unfortunate demise of Vidyutjivah. Shurpanaka, lacking control over her sibling, remained vigilant for a chance to assert her influence. Upon locating Rama, it became apparent that her intentions were not of a romantic nature towards him or Lakshman, who had even subjected her to insult.

Thus, Shurpanaka assumed the role of the malevolent mastermind responsible for the significant events of the Ramayana. She was a prominent feminist who advocated for respect in all circumstances. From her brother Ravana to Ram, she experienced humiliation. The literary work entitled *Lanka's Princess* by Kavita Kane offers a narrative perspective from the perspective of Shurpanaka. Despite her lack of power and voice, her strong-willed character propelled her to success, and the rest is now in the records of history.

Shakuni, also referred to as Saubala, was one of the sons of King Subala and held the title of Prince of Gandhara. He was the maternal uncle of the Kauravas and the brother of Gandhari. He is regarded as the strategic architect responsible for the Kurukshetra War. The quality of deceit is consistently personified in him. He had a very high level of intelligence. He escorted Gandhari to Hastinapur for her wedding with Dhirtharashtra, who was visually impaired. Shortly after the wedding, Gandhari blindfolded her eyes. Shakuni was not happy with the matrimonial union of Gandhari and Dhirtharashtra, and thereafter he had a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the Kuru clan.

Meanwhile, Bhisma comes to know about the past of Gandhari, that she was a manglik and was given in marriage to a goat before her marriage with Dhirtharashtra. This fact was hidden by Gandhari's family. So Bhisma becomes furious and orders Hastinapur to launch an attack on Gandhara. Consequently, King Saubala, Shakuni, and his siblings were held captive in Hastinapur. They were provided only with a fistful of rice on a daily basis. King Saubala and his sons opted to select the most intelligent individual among them as the one most likely to survive. Each individual contributed their share of rice to Shakuni, as he was the one who was selected to survive.

As a result, all of Shakuni's male siblings and their father perished. Prior to his demise, Shakuni's father instructed him to design a dice from his bones. Using supernatural abilities, he was able to manipulate the outcome of the dice to obtain his desired number. Furthermore, he vigorously struck the leg of Shakuni, causing him to experience a persistent limp as a reminder to seek retribution against the Kuru Clan. He joined forces with the Kauravas out of a desire for retribution, instilling in his nephew Duryodhana a strong animosity toward his cousins, the Pandavas.

Duryodhana held his maternal uncle in high esteem due to his wise counsel on political affairs. He emerged as the strategic genius behind the Kurukshetra war. He strategized the game of dice with the intention of triumphing over the Pandavas, ultimately achieving success through the utilization of the supernatural abilities of the dice. He is often regarded as the embodiment of deception. Despite being voiceless and suppressed by power, Shakuni's mental faculties enabled him to achieve success. In his literary work titled *Shakuni & the Dice of Doom*, Mallar Chatterjee provides insights into the lesser-known aspects of Shakuni's character.

According to legend, Draupadi's birth was the result of King Drupad performing a yagna as a means of seeking retribution against Dhronacharya. Therefore, she came into existence as a result of intense feelings of fury and a desire for retribution. Draupadi emerged from the fire in the prime of her youth. She possessed remarkable physical attractiveness and intellectual prowess. She can be regarded as the foremost feminist among women. She expressed her opinions candidly and exhibited assertive behaviour.

The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a retelling of the epic narrative from the perspective of Draupadi. Divakaruni adeptly portrays Draupadi in both her admirable qualities and her flaws. In the context of the swayamvar, Draupadi chose Arjuna and disregarded Karna. It is one of the characteristic features of the Pandavas to submit the reward of their victories at their mother Kunti's feet. They did the same with Draupadi. The mother requested that her sons distribute the reward among themselves without inspecting its contents. Therefore, Draupadi was perceived merely as an object. The experience caused her to feel a sense of humiliation and rendered her unable to articulate a response. She was married to the five Pandava

princes.

Draupadi's marital life necessitated a significant amount of self-discipline. She was compelled to modify her lifestyle in accordance with the preferences of each of her spouses. She was required to assume responsibility and demonstrate commitment. Despite possessing a strong will, she experienced numerous instances of humiliation. Yudhister used Draupadi as an object in the game of dice and subsequently lost her to the Kauravas. She was subjected to public insults. So Draupadi made a solemn commitment to seek retribution against the Kauravas, ultimately resulting in the Kurukshetra war.

Despite possessing confidence and strength, she underwent a lot of trauma and remained without a voice. Her existence was characterized by tumultuous circumstances. Despite having five sons, she was unable to fulfil the role of a mother. The Pandavas also failed to provide her with social standing as queen. Therefore, Draupadi was compelled to lead a life of silence and submission.

This study elucidates that the aforementioned characters were devoid of vocal expression and subjected to oppression. Despite being the architects of significant events in historical narratives, they belong to the subaltern class and are unable to articulate their perspectives.

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