

POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE ON REWRITING THE MYTH MAHABHARATA: THE DEVIATING DEPICTION OF DURYODHANA IN ANAND NEELAKANTAN'S *ROLL OF THE DICE*

*Sowmya. T, Research Scholar; Department of English,
Avinashilingam institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore*
*Dr. S. Christina Rebecca, Professor and Head Dept. of English,
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore*

Abstract:

Rewriting the myth paves way for the development of new concepts, ideas about certain incidents or events that in turn provide a distinct perspective of the myth. Anand Neelakantan's novel, The Roll of the Dice is a recreation of an euphoric myth which procreates into multiple dimensions to draw the attention of the readers on his new makeover of the character Duryodhana. Unlike other portrayal of the archetypal Duryodhana as an antagonist, this novel portrays him as a protagonist, who is altruistic by nature. Retelling, as a strategy, aids in overseeing the myth Mahabharata under different construal, deviating from the original myth. This article aims at breaking the stereotypical image of Duryodhana as an evil and proves him as an idealist. Thus, the rewriting of the text is to be distorted, constructed and interpreted into multiple layers of understanding the mythical characters. Neelakantan's Duryodhana, is an unseen possibility that challenges the conventional text. The article attempts to showcase the narrative changes in the exuberant myth, which demystifies the original myth by prioritising the contemporary view of postmodern writing.

Key Words: *Rewriting, Myth, Intertextuality, fiction and contemporaneity.*

Literature is allusive, and seems to radiate from a centre. Literature develops out of, or is preceded by body of myths, legends, folktales, which are transmitted by the earlier classics (Frye44).

Rewriting the old text turns out to be the basic purpose of the postmodern writers. The imitation of the old texts, myth and history that is anterior, never original is what postmodernist prefers to write. Neelakantan emphasizes on intertextuality in his rewriting of the myth, Mahabharata from a completely divergent panorama, which signifies that his rewriting is from the already well known text. As Gass puts it; "Traditionally, stories were stolen, as Chaucer stole his; or they were felt to be the common property of a culture or community... These notable happenings, imagined or real, lay outside language... in a condition of pure occurrence" (147). Myths are based on sacred stories, it is considered as a true sign of the past. As Rich would put it; "Re-vision the act of looking back, of seeing myth fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival" (121).

The original myth is recontextualized along with Neelakantan's self- reflexive fictionality, he dismantles the old view of Duryodhana as a wicked and projects him as an altruistic man. By depicting such a modern construction he achieves in rendering countless layer of interpretations to his novel. He senses something new to focus on the character Duryodhana, as the essence of the past to be rewritten in a disparate perspective. As Bassnett and Lefevere observes; "Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting

can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices...” (7).

The novel examines the character Duryodhana who believes that the purpose of his birth is to bring equality among people in Hastinapura. Suyodhana(Duryodhana) represents the Kauravas and trusts his birth right in the world is to rule the kingdom by bringing equality among his people. Unlike the original myth, Suyodhana here is shown as a man full of tender love and kindness, who cares for all the people inspite of class distinction. In this rewriting, Pandavas are those who follow class distinction, whereas Suyodhana objects to it. He makes Karna, the son of a charioteer, as the king of Anga, on the basis of his wisdom. The novel commences with the depiction of the childhood days of the kuru clans, where the Pandavas torments the Kauravas.

The postmodern writer is not governed by the rules, they are left free to rewrite the antique texts into the fictional modern world. Neelakantan revisits the contents of Mahabharata and reinterprets it. He also demystifies the conventional style of the past. In his note to the novel, the author explains the reason of his rewriting Mahabharata by breaking the stereotypical view of Duryodhana as a protagonist. He claims, “... a different picture of Duryodhana began to emerge far removed from the scheming, roaring, arrogant villain of popular television serials... gullible public” (7). He attempts to rewrite and narrate it from the loser's point of view and tries to bring justice for them with a question, “If Duryodhana was an evil man, why did great men like Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and the entire army of Krishna, fight the war on his side?” (8). Neelakantan adds metafiction to his novel self-consciously and draws the attention of the readers to pose questions about the past and present text. In reading a new construction of Duryodhana, the readers not only examine the structure of the narrative fiction, but also explore the text by placing it outside the world. As Hutcheon puts it, “Historiographic metafiction represents not just a world of fiction, however self-consciously presented as a constructed one, but also a world of public experience” (36).

Neelakantan recreates his own myth, by presenting Suyodhana as a kind-hearted human, unlike from the original myth. For instance, when Drona questions Suyodhana on targeting a bird, the latter's answer is something new out of the old myth, Neelakantan replaces this event and blunts it with his own fictionality;

“What do you see there?”

“I see love”

“What are you? A poet? Draw your bow and tell me what you see there.”

“Swami, I see life. I see two souls, united in love. I see bliss in their eyes and hear celebration in their voices. I see the blue sky spread like a canopy above them. I feel the breeze that ruffles their feathers. I smell the fragrance of ripe mangoes...” (93)

Another instance for is that when Drona asks Suyodhana to bring the king Panchala, to fulfil his vengeance. The king once, humiliated Drona so he wants to take revenge on him. But when Suyodhana comes back with gifts from the king Panchala and says the king is ready to surrender. Drona insults him saying’ “... Who needs his gifts?... Fool! You have sold the honour of your Guru for a few gold coins. Perhaps the Panchala army even defeated you and you looted some villages on the way back to present me with these gifts” (279). Neelakantan includes his own interpretation here, to show that Suyodhana is kind hearted and forgives people when they apologise and accepts their mistake. A unique aspect of Suyodhana is that, he is bestowed with love for his people and does not wants to see his kingdom drenched in blood.

Neelakantan adroitly uses intertextuality to pave way for the development of rewriting the old text. Contemporary postmodern writers rely on the antique works and reconstruct it. Thus Julia Kristeva observes, literary text is not a product of single author. She further says a text has connection with the other text; the author compiles a text by reading other texts. The author does not create anything from their own minds but write from the texts that already exist. She explains the text as “A permutation of texts, intertextuality in the given text where several utterances, taken from other texts intersect and neutralize one another” (36). Neelakantan in his novel, *The Roll of the Dice* fascinates his rewriting by intersecting

new incidents from his own interpretation.

He portrays the love between Suyodhana and Subhadra, which is far fetched from the original epic is, where Suyodhana proposes to Subhadra, "Subhadra, I want to marry you. The thing is to ask your brother for your hand. May I do so, my dear?" (191). Neelakantan makes the novel more fictitious by bringing in love between Suyodhana and Subhadra where the latter cheats the former by marrying Arjuna. Later in the novel, Suyodhana even after great humiliation faces Subhadra with a smile, when she comes to Hastinapura with his son, Abimanyu.

Drona favours Arjuna in the original myth as well as in Neelakantan's version of rewriting. But in this rewriting, Drona hates Suyodhana completely and openly tries to separate his son, Ashwathamma from him. He yells at Suyodhana saying;

You have spoilt my son too. You roam the streets without caring for the taboos or about pollution, touching everyone, eating with shudras and playing with children from the slums... And you, Prince Suyodhana... No, I should call you Duryodhana, for that is what you are- one who does not know how to handle arms, ... You bring only shame on your ancient line and on Hastinapura, Prince. (89)

Manifesting the abundant presence of intertextuality makes the novel opens to different layers of interpretations. The author while rewriting a text in postmodern style, draws attention from other texts that is related to his subject. Similarly, Neelakantan relates his rewriting with the original myth, Mahabharata and compiles it with creativity, where the meaning of the novel becomes wider to the contemporary readers and goes beyond what is there in the original text. Elmo Raj claims; "... there is no independent meaning, no independent text and no independent interpretation. Singularity is illusory. The text would become text to open up the dynamics of intertextuality within and outside the text" (80).

Intertextuality provides the reader with many ways of looking into the texts because it believes the text is not a closed one but an open product giving numberless traces to other texts. Kristeva claims that there is a link between a text and the other texts emerging in different forms. In simplest way, intertextuality is a way of interpreting texts by focusing on the concept, which is connected with other texts. Shakuni is the one who attempts to make Duryodhana, the villainous. Shakuni plans to trap Suyodhana for murdering Bhima, where Suyodhana then accused as the murderer. Guards come to Suyodhana saying, "Prince, you are arrested on suspicion of murder and the court has ordered your presence" (151). Neelakantan shows the fact that Shakuni is the evil, who wants to destroy the whole world to take revenge and he uses Suyodhana as a tool to fulfil his vengeance.

This paper is an endeavour to bring to the fore the popular receptive notion of Duryodhana, not just being a catalectic personality bringing war between brothers and doing evil but also a human who longed for equality and who give voice to the voiceless. Neelakantan shows Duryodhana as an innocent and a tender hearted person and shows how people do worship him by bringing the fact that there is also a temple in Kerala for Duryodhana. By rewriting the texts from Suyodhana's perspective enables the readers to interpret it in many ways. This brings some kind of interaction among the reader and the author. Intertextuality offers new ways of thinking for understanding and interpreting texts. Allen points out saying; "The act of reading... plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading, thus, becomes a process of moving between texts" (1). Neelakantan's *Roll of Dice* does move between the text and among us by its fresh perspective.

Works Cited

1. Allen, G. *Intertextuality*. Routledge, 2001.
2. Bassnett, Susan and Andre, Lefevere (eds). *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Shanghai, 2001.
3. Elmo Raj, Prayer. "Text/ Texts: Interrogating Julia Kristeva's Concept of Intertextuality" Vol. 3,

- 2015, pp. 78-80.
4. Frye, Northrop. "The Developing Imagination." *Learning in Language and Literature*, Cambridge UP, 1963.
5. Gass, William H. *Habitations of the World: Essays*. New York, 1985.
6. Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London, 1989.
7. Kristeva, Julia. "Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Language and Art." Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Ed. Leon. S. Roudiez, New York, 1980.
8. Neelakantan, Anand. *Roll of the Dice*. Platinum Press, 2015.
9. Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English*, Vol.34, No.1, 1972.