A Study on Mahabharat's Vile Villain Shakuni in Mallar Chatterjee's Shakuni & The Dice of Doom

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Abstract

Indian epics are an important element of India's rich cultural past. These epics have impacted Indian society's social and religious ideas, offering ethical advice to people and impacting their everyday lives. The Mahabharat and the Ramayana are two of Indian literature's most well-known epics. The representation of villains who function as adversaries to the heroes or protagonists is an important feature in these two Indian epics. These villains frequently exemplify the dark and evil parts of human nature. However, the villains also play a significant part in the text by evaluating and challenging the protagonist's righteousness. Villains demonstrate the value of characteristics such as bravery, kindness, and selflessness by their acts. In the line of underappreciated villains in Indian Epic, there is a magnificent legend named Shakuni in the Hindu epic Mahabharat. The Mahabharat tells a story of two sides fighting to rule a kingdom named Hastinapur. In the Mahabharat, the character of Shakuni is not properly explained by the author Maharishi Veda Vyasa. The author does not throw much light on Shakuni's original personality or nature. Using Mallar Chatterjee's retelling epics book 2 named Shakuni & the Dice of Doom the paper examines the real character of Shakuni and his reasons for choosing evil path. The author has written a new Mahabharat in the perspective of Shakuni. The thesis focuses on finding Shakuni's original character, skills, love, hate, personality, devotion and relationship.

Keywords: Shakuni, Villain, Indian epic, Mahabharat, Character analysis

Introduction

Literature is an important part of human life since it provides people with enjoyment, information, amusement and values. The goal of literature is not just to amuse, it also represents human life in the past, present, and future generations' forecasts. When it comes to writing, each generation has its own set of opportunities and limits. Literature has progressed to the point that it is now a part of people's daily life.

A genre is a type of artistic, musical, or literary production distinguished by a distinct style, form, or substance. There are many types of genres in literature that include poem, short story, play, prose or essay etc. Among other genres of literature novel holds many types of sub-genres. Those are historical, psychological, picaresque, emotional, horror, book of etiquette, pastoral, detective, mystery, thriller, western, fantasy, and the working class.

A novel is a lengthy narrative and an imaginary or non-imaginary tale that depicts character and action with some point of realism. Novel is usually focused on the characters' actions, life and motives. It gives the background information of each and every character shown. It also explains the reason and motive behind a character action. Novel also enables people to rewrite the known stories in different point of view.

There are various novels which deal with retelling Indian Mythological writings. Among the others, the paper focuses on Mallar Chatterjee's Historical fiction novel Shakuni & the Dice of Doom published in 2019 by Readomania publishing house. Aside from his famous writings, he is a remarkable speaker who has received several honours for his literary speeches at literary festivals. He began his career as a speaker and gradually gained the opportunity to publish his writings with the assistance of Deepak Mukherjee (publisher). He has completed his M.A. Economics in University of Kalyani. Chatterjee regularly explores significant historical characters in his settings, letting readers to better comprehend how these individuals would have responded to their surroundings. The goal of his work is to show readers the uniqueness of historical personalities.

The Historical novel is based on the character Shakuni, often considered as one of the vilest villains in Indian tradition and also one of the epic's most fascinating characters. Shakuni is represented in the ancient Indian epic Mahabharat as a clever strategist who played a critical part in igniting the great battle of Kurukshetra. The Mahabharat, an Indian epic, is a timeless story of rivalry and war between two divisions of a noble dynasty. Shakuni is frequently regarded as a skilled strategist who played a significant role in bringing the Kauravas to their final downfall.

An in-depth examination of Mahabharat's tale, on the other hand, reveals Shakuni to be a tragic man whose acts are motivated by an overwhelming feeling of oppression and vengeance. Shakuni is known as one of the main antagonist in the ancient epic Mahabharat. He is also portrayed as a manipulator by readers. The Mahabharat does not directly detail Shakuni's personal narrative. However, there are other historical and mythical narratives that shed light on his life.

Shakuni is the prince of Gandhara, a territory in modern-day Afghanistan. Shakuni has 98 brothers and one sister named Gandhari. Shakuni loves his sister more than anyone else in the family. His father and King of Gandhara is Subal. Gandhara is a small and beautiful kingdom surrounded by mountains. He is a great son, father, husband, brother and also a great king. Shakuni means a large bird in Sanskrit language. Shakuni has many names in the story like Gandhararaja, Gandharnaresh, Saubala, Gandharapati, Subalaputra etc. Subal and Sudarma's eldest son is Shakuni. He is well-known for his extraordinary intellect in politics.

The first incident that evokes hate in Shakuni is his sister's marriage with a blind Kuru prince Dhritarashthira. He does not like the idea of giving his sister's hand to Dhritarashthira because Bhisma (son of Goddess Ganga & protector of Kuru dynasty) captures places belongs to Gandhara and threatened King Subal to accept the alliance. Bhisma has also sent a threatening letter to King Subal. The letter holds the following lines

"The segment of land we have just occupied by defeating your ill-equipped and unskilled soldiers does not interest us. Rather, we, with some degree of humility, express our sincere intention of forging a blissful marital alliance between your charming daughter Gandhari and the eldest Kuru prince Dhritarashtra" (Chatterjee, 42)

Shakuni accepts the alliance because he does not have any options left. Another incident is Gandhari blindfolding herself to become equal to her husband. Gandhari is afraid of dark since her childhood is a well-known fact to Shakuni. He watches her sister struggling in the dark every day. This left a deep scar in Shakuni's heart. Also he believes that his sister will become the future Queen of large kingdom in Aryavarta. But Dhritarashthira is not accepted as a king because of his blindness. Shakuni wants to see his sister becoming queen so he stayed in Hastinapur and started indulging himself in Hastinapur political matters.

Gandhari has a manglik dosh. So she first married a goat to erase the manglik dosh. Later Dhritarashthira and Bhisma came to know about this incident they captures Subal, his wife and his 99 sons. Dhritarashthira does not give proper food to them also. So King Subal decides to give all the food to one person to take revenge on Kuru Dynasty. He selects Shakuni because Subal knows the capability and intelligence of him. Shakuni is released after the intervention of Gandhari but his entire family is dead. So he vows to take revenge on Kuru clan that day.

There are various rumours behind this particular character but no one wants to know the original story behind these rumours. Mallar Chatterjee in his work breaks all the rumours surrounded Shakuni by analysing original text of Mahabharata. The first rumour is about Shakuni's dice. Many folklores and retellings mentions that his dice is made of his father's bones or it holds magical powers or it has a black bumblebee listen to all his commands. But the truth is that the dice is made of Ivory and gifted to him by a sage who often visits his kingdom to meet his father King Subal. This shows that the critics did not analyse the character of Shakuni deeply.

 "I am skilful at dice. There is none equal to me in this respect on earth, no, not even in the three worlds, O son of Kuru. Therefore, ask him to play dice. Skilled at dice, I will win his kingdom and that splendid prosperity of this for you" (Chandra Roy, Sabha Parva, 106)

Shakuni is truly a skilful player in dice games. In the Mahabharata Shakuni mentions these lines which support the idea that he is the master of dice game not a magician.

Shakuni is not a mastermind who directly involved in all the evil actions of Duryodhana. The total plan and execution of poisoning Bhima (Second Pandava brother) is by Duryodhana because he did not like the strong figure of Bhima. Next Burning Lakshagrih (Wax palace) at Varan vat is also a plan of Duryodhana and Kanika (Minister of Hastinapur) to erase the Pandavas from the line to the throne. This plan involves the King Dhritarashthira also because he also wants his son to become a next ruler of Hastinapur.

One of Shakuni's most notable acts is manipulating the game of dice, which ultimately led to the Pandavas losing their kingdom and being forced into exile. The truth is Duryodhana has become very jealous of the Pandava brothers after the coronation of Yudhishthira (Elder Pandava brother) in Khandavaprasta. Shakuni advises Duryodhana not to be jealous but he did not listen to any of his advice. In the coronation Duryodhana and his brothers faced insults. Unable to bear the insults Duryodhana asks help from his maternal uncle Shakuni to help him get his revenge. To make his niece happy he also accepts to help him in the revenge plan. He also tells Duryodhana to inform this entire plan to his father (Dhritarashthira) then only he will play the dice game.

Conclusion

In literature, villains are frequently shown as antagonists who bring suffering to the main character and obstruct their path to attaining their goals. Despite their terrible activities, these villains have distinguishing characteristics that make them complex personalities. These good characteristics make the villains more fascinating and give their personalities more dimension. Furthermore, in Indian epics, highlighting the positive side of villains serves a greater purpose than simply making them more intriguing. It communicates the concept that even those who perform bad acts have redeeming features and are not completely devoid of positive attributes.

This concept of multifaceted personalities does not apply only to villains, but also to protagonists. All the characters in the Mahabharat cannot be classified as noble. Each character is bad for his or her motives. For instance, Lord Krishna employs a variety of strategies to ensure the Pandavas' triumph. Krishna orders Bhima to assault Duryodhana in the thigh area, which is both unethical and a banned martial arts practise. As the novel unfolds, it becomes evident that Shakuni is a brilliant strategist who used his intellect to manipulate events in favour of his cause.

Shakuni, like the other adversaries, is deceived, misinterpreted, and mistreated. The paper is able to locate the transition among fact, symbolism, and fiction, revealing Shakuni's poor soul, a person suffering of guilt, an individual who is kind, and longs to reclaim his former life charm, but is filled with revenge for the loss of his beloved siblings and father. The study work seeks to reconstruct Shakuni's true nature, disregarding his depiction in popular analysis or narratives and positioning him inside the old society and its conflicts. Shakuni's personality fluctuates between good and evil, honesty and falsehoods, revenge and self-respect.

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