



**REINTERPRETATION MAHABHARATA FROM DURYODHANA'S PERSPECTIVE : A  
MYTHICAL STUDY OF ANAND NEELAKANTAN'S "AJAYA: ROLL OF THE DICE"**

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**Abstract:**

*Myths traditionally created to explain the origins of the world or of belief systems or natural occurrences in the location of the culture. A myth is a story comes from an ancient culture and it includes supernatural elements. Myths are passed down from one generation to the next generation. The Mahabharata a great Indian epic goes beyond the time and space as a reflection of socio-cultural matrix in which it was developed. This grand epic has been the object of several telling and reinterpretation over centuries. The Mahabharata is a celebration of ancient Indian history and culture. These epics have not been applied by modern writers as religious text but have been reconstructed for different purposes and ideological purposes. The Mahabharata celebrates multiple heroes but the Kauravas are mostly presented as having evil minds and standing against religion. The present research paper attempts to study Anand Neelakantan's "Ajaya: Roll of the Dice" from Duryodhana's Point of view. Duryodhana has been presented as a positive character whom so far seen as the biggest villain.*



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**Introduction:**

Anand Neelakantan wrote an Indian novel of mythological fiction named "*Ajaya: Roll of Dice*" in 2013. The first installment of the Ajaya series is that it tells the story of the Kauravas. The entire story is written from Duryodhana's view as opposed to the usual tale told from the point of view of the victors. The novel takes on the Mahabharata and focusing on the "unconquerable" Kauravas. Anand Neelakantan has accepted to finding the flawed antiheroes more like human being rather than the perfect, celebrated heroes of the great epics. Popular culture and literature always glorified the victor rather than the vanquished. He said that he felt strong desire to narrate stories of the vanquished and give life to those silent heroes who have been overlooked in epic.

The present research paper reinterprets the story of the Mahabharata but from the perspective of Suyodhana popularly known as Duryodhana. He is named as Suyodhana and he is shown as a kind hearted and compassionate prince who was against the norms of caste system and believed that ability and not birth should decided what a person can and can't do. Suyodhana a crown prince of Hastinapura narrates the story. He is the most reviled or insulted villain of Indian mythology and his fight to claim his



birthright the throne of Hastinapura. His detractor derogatorily referred to as 'Duryodhana'. Suyodhana is determined to hold onto the legacy of Kuru clan which is legitimately his.

Looking at Suyodhana, through the eyes of the villagers of Poruvazhy in Kerala, this Hastinapura prince is the presiding deity of a temple. Suyodhana shown scheming, roaring, arrogant villain in popular television serials and traditional retelling become the honest self-willed, brave prince who fought for what he believed in. The incident made the writer reinterprets Mahabharata from a different perspective that is:

"Once I started viewing the Kaurava Prince through the eyes of the villagers of Poruvazhy a different picture of Duryodhana began to emerge-far removed from the scheming, roaring, arrogant villain of popular television serials and traditional retellings. Instead, here was a brutally honest prince: brave and self-willed, willing to fight for what he believed in, Duryodhana never believed in his Pandava cousin to be of divine origin; and to modern minds, their outlandish claim now sounds chillingly similar to present day political propaganda used to fool gullible public."  
(Ajaya, 7)

Neelakanthan introduces Suyodhana as the prince of the blood. He establishes Suyodhana's claim to the throne as the true inheritor of the Kuru bloodline. Pandavas criticize Suyodhana on the blindness of his father. Suyodhana is the weak and wispy ten years old. He is tormented, abused and threatened by his cousin Bhima like this:

"I will find you Suyodhana, and drag you out from whichever rat hole you are hiding in. You coward! Come out! I am not blind like your father. I will find you and thrash you." (Ajaya, 18)

Suyodhana is sad and confused at Bhima's treatment of his uncle Vidhura and Vidhura's own embarrassment at Suyodhana's show of affection. The learned Brahmins insulted Vidhura in Suyodhana's father's court. They question his lineage and authority to quote from the scripture and Suyodhana gets hurt. A little Suyodhana wants to grow up quickly so he could find answers to the questions which the elders avoided to answer and that troubled his mind. In the presence of Shakuni, Suyodhana finds comfort but he could not understand the Gandhara prince's interest motives or his hostilities. Drona comes and he supports the Yudhishtira's claim to the throne. Suyodhana realizes the kind of conspiracy that his uncle Shakuni had always warned him against.

The present paper shows an interesting angle of the love story of Suyodhana and Subhadra. A marriage was sanctioned by both Dhritrashtra and Balarama. It did not take place because Subhadra eloped with Arjuna on provocation by Krishna. In social circumstance it stands that if aggressiveness is the trait of man and softness is the corresponding trait of women, but in the novel Suyodhana is rejected by his suitor Subhadra who eloped with Arjuna. Suyodhana becomes upset and behaves unhappy because of his lover. Even after years, he still bears softness for his once beloved, where men like Bhishma who abducts a woman for his step brother Vichitravirya, like the Pandavas sharing Draupadi. Suyodhana decided not to fight her or use his kingdom's resource to settle a personal account. Duryodhana stands out with his otherwise feminine yearning as Kate Millett writes in her *Sexual Politics*:



"Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through child-hood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notion of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. Every movement of the child's life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one. (Millett, 31)

Suyodhana felt worthless and used. He was the fool who lost his bride to his cousin and thinking that: "Son of blind parents I too, did not have the vision to see subhadra was making a mockery of my love. I have been blind." (*Ajaya*, 341)

The novel *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* offers another effective narrative perspective that is the prince of Gandhara, Shakuni He has only ambition that is the destruction of Kaurava clan and their kingdom. The Grand Regent of Hastinapura, Bhima killed his father brother, the abducting of his sister and therefore Shakuni to take revenge. Shakuni could deceive people so easily that he make proud of himself. He is master in the game of dice and intrigue and placed his man in key locations in Hastinapura to carry out the task of destroying India. Suyodhana is the most important piece of this game of dice. Shakuni cheat anyone but not his sister. He said that:

"It did not matter that she had chosen to be blind like her husband. She still saw through him. The silken bands covering her eyes notwithstanding. She could strip his soul naked with just a tilt of her head." (*Ajaya*, 137)

Shakuni organizes the building of the palace of lac for the pandavas and made the plan to burn them alive and put the blame on the Suyodhana. This action reveals that Shakuni has no genuine love for Suyodhana and the rest of his nephews. Shakuni's sole intention is destroying the Indian kingdom and the men who are responsible for the death of his family. He considered all people as his pawn in the big game of dice. As Shakuni wants that:

"Everything looked perfect to the Gandhara prince. This land was finished. Shakuni could almost hear the voices of his slain people, echoing around him. He wanted to cheer with them. But this was not the time for triumphant displays. There was still work to be done he waited for the inevitable." (*Ajaya*, 432)

Shakuni skillfully attract his enemies into a trap and a game of dice to be happen where Yudhishtira loses his kingdom, his brothers and wife.

The Novel *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* presents another prominent narrative voice that is the chaioter's son Karana. He was skilled in archery but he ridiculed and scorned by the Drona, Dhaumya and the five Pandava brothers. He views ending his miserable, worthless, suta life. Under the training of the great Parasurama he travels to the Deep South to become an excellence warrior. Suyodhana realizes the potential of the suta and take him under his wing. Suyodhana make him a king:

"Duryodhana's personality comes alive when he makes Karna the king of ange at a crucial movement in his life, when he is being humiliated because of his caste. The Kaurava princess challenges orthodoxy by making a Suta a king." (*Ajaya*, 7)



Karna is generous, charitable and exceptionally gifted. He is Suyodhana's answer to the third Pandava price. Suyodhana stands by him when karna rejected and insulted by the Pandavas. Duryodhana allow him as deserving of becoming a Kshatriya and a king. When Draupadi openly insulted in her father's court he shows remarkable balance. He willing to help the poor and the down- trodden, giving away all his priceless gems, jewels and gold in charity, depicted as a generous and noble. He is prepared to put down his life for his dear friend who had honored him with weather and title when the rest of the world ridiculed him as a Suta he back every insult at the game of dice that he had suffered.

Thus, Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* reinterpret the history of the Kuru clan from multiple perspectives, from the points of view of people belonging to different strata of society. He explores the narrative potentials inherent in the voices of the marginalized characters of the popular reinterpretation of Mahabharata like Gandhari, Aswathama, Drona, Balarama and Takshaka in *Ajaya*. Neelakantan casually demolishes conceptions of the notions of the ideal and dharma. He offers a glance into an alternate reality that might have existed and had conveniently been overlooked, sidelined or even silenced in culturally sanctioned renditions of the grand epic. *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* is an attempt to view the history of the Kurukshetra from the perspective of the vanquished the side that lost the war, the people that sided with the antihero "Duryodhana" of popular telling in recognition of his integrity, nobility, loyalty, Chivalry and manliness.

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