

FITTING THE TEMPLATE: THE TRAGIC HEROES OF INDIAN LEGENDS



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
English Language and Literature*

By

BHADRA G NAIR

Register No. AM23ENG009

MA English

St. Teresa's College

Ernakulam

Supervisor

Ms. SAYOOJYA C S

Assistant Professor

Department of English

St. Teresa's College

Ernakulam

Kerala

March 2025

FITTING THE TEMPLATE: THE TRAGIC HEROES OF INDIAN LEGENDS



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
English Language and Literature*

By

BHADRA G NAIR

Register No. AM23ENG009

MA English

St. Teresa's College

Ernakulam

Supervisor

Ms. SAYOOJYA C S

Assistant Professor

Department of English

St. Teresa's College

Ernakulam

Kerala

March 2025



Handwritten signature

Valued

Tani

21/3/2025

Handwritten signature
21/3/2025

Handwritten signature



An Abstract of the Project Entitled:
Fitting the Template: The Tragic Heroes of Indian Legends

By

Bhadra G Nair

M.A. English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Reg. No. AM23ENG009

2023-2025

Supervising Teacher: Ms. Sayoojya C S

Aristotelian tragic hero, as recorded in his *Poetics*, is characterized as virtuous but not 'eminently good' noble personage, they are flawed individuals who commit, without evil intent, great wrongs that ultimately lead to their misfortune. Though primarily focused on Greek drama, *Poetics* transcends cultural and historical limitations, providing principles that are relevant to worldwide literary traditions. This study seeks to examine how these elements manifest in the Indian context by analysing two of the most influential works from the country, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Chapter one titled "The Ideals of a Tragic Hero" introduces the theoretical framework of the project and analyses the various aspects of Aristotelian tragic hero. Chapter two titled "Tragic Heroes from the Ramayana" analyses Rama, Bali and Kumbhakarna, characters from *Ramayana*, under Aristotle's tragic hero theory. Chapter three titled "Tragic Heroes from the Mahabharata" has, Bhishma, Drona and Parikshit as the characters under study. Chapter four titled "Breaking the Conventions: Women as Tragic Heroes" analyses female character from both these epics to show how Aristotle's theory applies to female characters as well in Indian context. The characters under study are Tadaka from *Ramayana* and Gandhari and Devayani from *Mahabharata*.



**ST.TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)
ERNAKULAM**

Certificate of Plagiarism Check for Dissertation

Author Name	BHADRA G NAIR
Course of Study	M.A. English
Name of Guide	Ms. SAYOOJYA C S
Department	English & Centre For Research
Acceptable Maximum Limit	20
Submitted By	library@teresas.ac.in
Paper Title	FITTING THE TEMPLATE: THE TRAGIC HEROES OF INDIAN LEGENDS
Similarity	10% AI - 16%
Paper ID	3404430
Total Pages	45
Submission Date	2025-03-15 14:38:24


Signature of Student


Signature of Guide


Checked By
College Librarian



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Fitting the Template: The Tragic Heroes of Indian Legends" is a record of bona fide work done by me under the supervision of Ms. Sayoojya C S, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title of recognition.



Bhadra G Nair

Reg. No. AM23ENG009

MA English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2025



CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled "Fitting the Template: The Tragic Heroes of Indian Legends", is a record of bona fide work carried out by Bhadra G Nair under my supervision and guidance.



Ms. Sayoojya C S

Assistant Professor

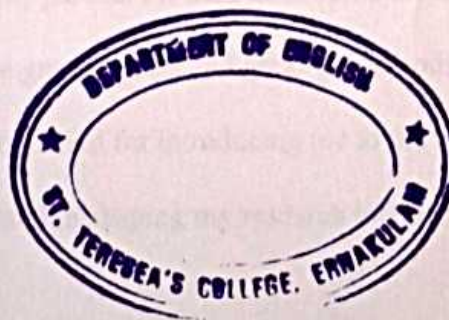
Department of English

St. Teresa's College

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all those who were instrumental in the conception and development of this dissertation. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Alphonsa Vijaya Joseph, Principal, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam for her help and support.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my Supervisor Ms. Sayoojya C S, Department of English, St. Teresa's College, without whose guidance and encouragement this project would never have been completed. I am fortunate that I had the kind association of my guide, whose careful monitoring and unstinted support enabled me to complete this work.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Preeti Kumar, Head of the Department of English, Dr. Tania Mary Vivera, my class teacher and all the faculty members for their encouragement and support. I also thank profusely all the members of the faculty, for their endless support and valuable suggestion throughout my study period.

I am deeply indebted to my parents for their unconditional love and constant support and deeply grateful to my late grandparents and great-grandmother for enriching my childhood with their wisdom and for introducing me to the world of Indian mythology, which has been instrumental in shaping my research interests.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my friends, whose encouragement and unwavering support have been invaluable. Their presence has made this journey both enriching and fulfilling.

BHADRA G NAIR

CONTENTS

	Introduction	1
Chapter 1	The Ideals of a Tragic Hero	6
Chapter 2	Tragic Heroes from the Ramayana	13
Chapter 3	Tragic Heroes from the Mahabharata	20
Chapter 4	Breaking the Conventions: Women as Tragic Heroes	27
	Conclusion	34
	Works Consulted	37

Introduction

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" writes Kipling in his famous work *The Ballad of East and West*. Here he alludes to a view widely held among his compatriots. It means that the East and the West have different cultures and ways of doing things and that they will never unite in doing things or looking at the world in the same way. He rejects this idea in the ballad. Many comparative studies that took place later reveal that there are many striking similarities between the artistic productions of both cultures. Art transcends borders and writers often think alike when exposed to similar circumstances (Marshall providencemag.com). One such instance can be found when Aristotle's idea of Tragic hero is applied to Indian epics. Pioneered by Aristotle, the various theories on tragedy and tragic heroes were developed by analysing Greek tragedies. An analysis of the stories of Indian epic heroes based on these theories makes one wonder if there has been a crossing of cultures. Indian works perfectly fit into the aspects of Western theory.

Epics are more than just historical accounts; they are depictions of the human condition, reflecting the never-ending conflicts between duty and sacrifice, virtue and fate. Among the world's many literary gems, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* hold an unparalleled position. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are to Indian civilisation and Hindu culture what the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are to Western civilisation. The two epics have influenced life, politics, society, and culture not just in India but across the world.

"As an ancient narrative that continues to influence the social, religious, cultural, and political life of modern South and Southeast Asia, the *Ramayana* hardly needs to be justified as an object of serious study" (Bose 3). The story of Rama's Ayana primarily describes the journey of Lord Vishnu's seventh incarnation and the trials he is subjected to while living a virtuous life in the human world. Along with the main story, the epic

also narrates the tale of three different clans that coexisted and often came into conflict with one other; the Rakshasas, the Vanaras and the Humans. *Mahabharata* is among the oldest and greatest works ever produced in the Indian subcontinent. The epic is known for its grandeur and structure. It uses frame narrative intricately weaving tales that cross paths with each other. Each character acts as the hero of his own story, which becomes part of the larger narrative. A closer look into these characters reveals that each possesses the qualities of an Aristotelian tragic hero. Written before *Poetics*, these epics are a testament to the genius of ancient Indian writers.

This work is an attempt to analyse a few characters of the great Indian epics using the characteristics of Aristotelian tragic hero and to determine the extent to which they resemble one.

Poetics stands as one of the most profound and enduring works of literary theory, shaping the foundation of Western dramatic criticism. It is the earliest surviving work of literary criticism and one of the most researched works. It has been revisited and reinterpreted numerous times. At the heart of *Poetics* lies Aristotle's concept of Tragedy, defined as an imitation (mimesis) of serious and complete action, arousing pity and fear to achieve a purging of emotions (catharsis). The six elements of tragedy elucidated by him are Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle and Song. "The Plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: Character holds the second place" (Aristotle 9). Plot is the most essential element of tragedy and the very soul of a dramatic work. In his view, a perfect tragic plot must be well structured with a proper beginning, middle and end. Character for him plays a secondary role. It exists to serve the plot. Thought is ranked third in his order and he defines it as a character's ability to say what is appropriate and necessary in a given situation. Fourth is Diction and he defines it as, "the expression of the meaning in words" (Aristotle 9). Good Diction ensures that ideas

and emotions are conveyed in depth. Song is the fifth element of Tragedy, it enhances the emotional impact of the play. Spectacle refers to the visual and sensory aspects of a play. Spectacle is, for him, the least important element. It enhances the emotional impact but should be subsidiary to strong storytelling. A tragedy should evoke pity and fear through characters and actions not just visual effects.

Along with elements of tragedy, Aristotle also defines his idea of a tragic hero. Aristotelian hero, as defined in *Poetics*, is characterized as virtuous but not "eminently good" noble personage, morally inclined while nonetheless subject to human error. He is a flawed individuals who commit, great wrongs that ultimately lead to their misfortune. The tragic hero is snared by his greatness: extraordinary competence and righteous passion for duty. The subsequent downfall of the hero results in a purgation of emotions in the spectator. A perfect tragic hero story, according to Aristotle contains elements of Hamartia or tragic flaw, Peripeteia or reversal of fortunes, Anagnorisis or self-realisation and Catharsis or evocation of pity and fear in the audience. Additionally, a tragic hero must be of noble birth and must not be completely virtuous or entirely evil.

Though primarily focused on Greek drama, *Poetics* transcends cultural and historical limitations, providing principles that are relevant to worldwide literary traditions. This study seeks to examine how these elements manifest in the Indian context by analysing two of the most influential and widely discussed works from the country, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

"The 'Iliad' and the 'Ramayana' as Tragic Epics" by Vijaya Guttal published in *Indian Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (206) (November-December, 2001), analyses *Ramayana* as a tragic epic comparable to Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. It discusses the tragic nature of human existence as portrayed in both the *Iliad* and the *Ramayana* and argues that true fulfilment comes only through immense suffering.

"Karna: An Ideal Tragic Hero of The *Mahabharata*", a research paper by Dr. Ashok Kumar & Piyush Ranjan published in The Academic Vol. 2, Issue 10 (October 2024) analyses Karna's character as a tragic hero in the light of Greek & Shakespearean tragic heroes.

There are not many scholarly articles or research work done on this particular topic. Though a few works analyse the tragic aspects of the epics in general and engage in a comparative study of Greek dramas and Indian epics majority of them try to compare *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* with Shakespearean tragedies. Rama is often viewed as a tragic hero, similarly, Karna is one of the extensively compared characters from *Mahabharata*, yet there is little systematic application of Aristotle's tragic hero criteria in any of these studies.

This work tries to bridge this gap in the study of Indian epics. It also tries to introduce a new perspective in the comparative study by breaking the limits of the Aristotelian tragic hero, who according to him can only be a masculine figure. He viewed women as worthless. In the Indian context, women have always been revered and treated in their divine form. Hence, it is no surprise that one finds, in Indian epics, women who are capable of being heroes let alone tragic heroes.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the theory of Aristotle as expounded by him in *Poetics*. It also describes the various aspects of the Aristotelean Tragic hero. Chapter 2 analyses a few characters from *Ramayana* under Aristotle's tragic hero theory. The characters under study are Rama, who belongs to the Human clan, Bali, who belongs to the Vanara clan and Kumbhakarna, who belongs to the Rakshasa clan. Characters from *Mahabharata* are analysed under Aristotle's theory in Chapter 3. Bhishma, Drona and Parikshit are the characters under study. Chapter 4 tries to establish the fact that, unlike the texts Aristotle analysed to develop his theory, Indian

epics feature several powerful female characters who possess the qualities of a hero and are worthy of analysis.

Chapter 1

The Ideals of a Tragic Hero

Aristotle's position as one of the most influential and revisited philosophers remains unquestioned. Even after two millennia since he wrote down his philosophies, philosophers and scholars heavily draw from him and return to him. Unlike Plato, Aristotle, his student, analysed the genre of Tragedy more sympathetically. In his work, *Poetics*, he analyses and puts forward the characteristics of Greek tragedy and Epic poetry. Aristotle explores the structure, purpose, and emotional impact of tragedy. His focus is on general principles rather than specific analysis.

Aristotle writes, "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions" (Aristotle 8). He further writes, "A perfect tragedy should, as we have seen, be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plan. It should, moreover, imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation" (Aristotle 14). Thus, Tragedy is a representation or mimesis of a significant action, that is, it deals with life-altering events which are not trivial. The action should be complete, that is, it should have a clear beginning, middle and end. The action should be grand and universal. Finally, the imitated action should excite pity and fear. He then highlights the use of rhetorical devices to appeal to the audience and how it varies according to the part depicted on the stage. Tragedy, unlike Epic poetry, unfolds through direct actions and dialogues. Tragedy affects the audience in a way that evokes pity, for the suffering hero and fear, because his misfortune could happen to anyone.

He does not simply analyse the genre but also states the characteristics of a good Tragedy. The six elements that determine the quality of a tragedy are Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle and Song. He then elucidates each of these elements. For him, the Plot is the most important element. It organises the action into a meaningful structure with a beginning middle and an end. Character comes second in importance. It should be believable and consistent. The third important element is Thought. It refers to the ideas, reasoning and themes expressed through the characters. The fourth element is Diction. It refers to the language and style of the play. The diction should be clear, elevated and appropriate to the subject matter. The song refers to the musical elements such as the chorus and lyrical passages. Spectacle refers to the visual and sensory aspects of a play. Spectacle is, for him, the least important element. It enhances the emotional impact but should be subsidiary to strong storytelling. A tragedy should evoke pity and fear through characters and actions not just visual effects.

He emphasises that dramatic action is more important than character. Character traits help in defining them but it cannot take the plot forward. "Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions" (Aristotle 9). A person's character shapes their morale, but their actions determine their fate. Their happiness and suffering are not determined by what they do but by who they are. An error in judgment or a moral weakness on the hero's part is what leads to his downfall.

In Chapter XV he writes, "In respect of Character there are four things to be aimed at. First, and most important, it must be good...the character will be good if the purpose is good. This rule is relative to each class" (Aristotle 16). The most important thing to be kept in mind while designing the hero's character is that he should be virtuous. The hero's

character must be admirable, but not flawless, only then will we be able to sympathize with his fate. His view about women is also noteworthy, "Even a woman may be good, and also a slave... There is a type of manly valour; but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate" (Aristotle 16). For him, women are inferior beings, higher only to slaves. They are not worthy of consideration and can never be a tragic hero.

Along with Tragedy Aristotle also analyses the Epic poetry genre. In *Poetics*, he highlights several key differences and similarities between both genres. He argues that epics must contain the same core dramatic elements as tragedies, except for song and spectacle, "Again, Epic poetry must have as many kinds as Tragedy: it must be simple, or complex, or 'ethical,' or 'pathetic.' The parts also, with the exception of song and spectacle, are the same; for it requires Reversals of the Situation, Recognitions, and Scenes of Suffering" (Aristotle 27). He categorises epic poetry as simple (A straightforward narrative without much complexity), complex (A narrative that includes elements of peripeteia and anagnorisis), ethical (A narrative that focuses on character and moral lesson) and pathetic (A story that evokes strong emotions, especially suffering and pity). Aristotle considers Homer's works as the ideal example of epic poetry. While the *Illiad* is simple and pathetic, *The Odyssey* is complex and ethical.

While it is important to have a unified plot in Tragedy, Epic poetry can be more flexible in its structure, allowing for a more sprawling narrative. Epic poetry differs from Tragedy in length and rhythm. Epic is longer than Tragedy. Tragedy is limited to a single continuous action while the narrative form of Epic Poetry makes the presentation of multiple lines of action easier. This results in a more enhanced effect because the audience gets a broader view of events. epic poetry's ability to depict simultaneous events gives it a natural grandeur and variety, making it more engaging and less repetitive than tragedy.

Tragedy needs elements of wonder to captivate the audience but it must be portrayed believably. Epic poetry has greater freedom to include irrational or unrealistic elements. "But in the Epic poem the absurdity passes unnoticed. Now the wonderful is pleasing: as may be inferred from the fact that everyone tells a story with some addition of his own, knowing that his hearers like it" (Aristotle 28). He argues that since Epic poetry is narrated and the audience relies on imagination, absurdity goes unnoticed. Despite these differences, Aristotle acknowledges that both genres share elements of Mimesis (imitation of life).

An important idea discussed in *Poetics* is the concept of a tragic hero. He writes that a poet should emulate a good portrait painter while writing about the tragic hero. Even if the hero is lazy, angry or flawed the poet, like a painter, should try to highlight their noble features. Great artists maintain the person's likeness but enhance their most striking features. Similarly, a poet should make the hero feel real with flaws, at the same time more striking and virtuous than common people. A tragic hero is a noble and admirable character who, despite possessing commendable qualities, ultimately succumbs to a downfall due to a tragic flaw or hamartia. Unlike a villain or an entirely faultless figure, the tragic hero is relatable, evoking both pity and fear in the audience. The hero's fate is not purely the result of the influence of external forces but rather a consequence of their own choices, making their tragedy deeply human. In Chapter XIII he details the characteristics of a tragic hero:

The change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this move neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity... Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral

sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear. There remains, then, the character between these two extremes—that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error of judgment. (Aristotle 14)

The tragic hero is usually of noble birth. His greatness determines the impact of his downfall. The higher his position the more pity one feels. The hero should be better than an average person but should not be completely flawless. He should be neither good nor evil. If he is completely good then his suffering would feel unjust and if he is evil then his downfall would not evoke pity. The hero's downfall is the result of an error in judgement due to his excessive pride, ignorance or impulsiveness. The audience should be able to see the hero's downfall as a result of his action, a good tragedy should be able to present it this way and thus evoke pity and fear in them.

At some point in the play, after the turn of events, the hero realises his mistake. The realization occurs too late that nothing can be undone and the hero's fate remains unchanged. The events in the hero's life lead to a purification of emotions in the audience's mind. Aristotle considers Oedipus, from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as an ideal tragic hero. As the king of Thebes he has a high position, his relentless pursuit of the truth becomes his tragic flaw or hamartia, and his excessive pride prompts him to unknowingly fulfil the prophecy. He goes from being a respectable king to realising the fact that he is the murderer he has been searching for, the moment of discovery marks his complete downfall. His position becomes worthy of the audience's pity and they feel fear because his story shows how human flaws can destroy even the greatest of men. The story teaches the audience about the limits of human knowledge, fate and free will.

The main points relating to a tragic hero's life are explained in detail by Aristotle. "Besides which, the most powerful elements of emotional: interest in Tragedy Peripeteia or

Reversal of the Situation, and Recognition scenes—are parts of the plot” (Aristotle 9). He explains the concepts of *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* together. “Reversal of the Situation is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity... Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune” (Aristotle 13). *Peripeteia* is a sudden shift in the story whereby the hero's fortune goes from being good to bad. In his worst state, the hero realises his mistake. The recognition of fault or movement from ignorance to knowledge happens at a moment when it is too late to reverse. The concept of reversal of fortune or *Peripeteia* is connected to the hero's tragic flaw. The idea of *Hamartia* often translated as the tragic flaw is described by Aristotle as an error in judgement or a moral weakness. Noble and virtuous, the hero falls into misfortune due to this error. The final effect of the tragic hero's story on the audience is what Aristotle calls *Catharsis* or emotional cleansing. This is the sole purpose of a tragic tale. “...through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions” (Aristotle 8). The tragic hero's character is above the common men but like them he too possesses human flaws hence his life evokes pity and fear in the viewers. They relate with the hero and realise that whatever is shown on the stage can happen in their lives too, thus they sympathize with him. This results in the achievement of emotional clarity. The emotional impact depends on the relationship between the characters. If the harm is caused to an enemy the audience is not deeply affected. The error in judgement should affect a loved one or someone so close to the tragic hero for pity and fear to arise. In Chapter XIV he elaborates on the circumstances that would strike the audience terribly:

“Let us then determine what are the circumstances which strike us as terrible or pitiful. Actions capable of this effect must happen between persons who are either friends or enemies or indifferent to one another. If an enemy kills an enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in the act or

the intention, —except so far as the suffering in itself is pitiful. So again, with indifferent persons. But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another—if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done—these are the situations to be looked for by the poet”. (Aristotle 15)

Comparing Aristotle's theory with Ramayana and Mahabharata will reveal the fact that the Indian and Greek ways of looking at the truths of life were strikingly similar. Indian epic heroes, though not openly presented so, still embody the essence of tragic heroes. They face profound suffering, moral dilemmas, and unavoidable fate. Analysing Indian heroes based on Aristotle's theory will bring to light this aspect of their tale.

Chapter 2

Tragic Heroes from the Ramayana

The *Ramayana*, is an epic intricately woven into the spiritual and cultural fabric of India, it transcends simple mythology to emerge as a profound philosophical and moral discourse. It is not merely the story of deities and malevolent forces but a deeply human narrative focused on duty, sacrifice, and destiny. Though *Ramayana* is filled with characters of divine origin and purpose, we see them become helpless humans in various instances. When examined through the lens of Aristotelian tragedy, the epic's heroes—foremost among them, Lord Rama—emerge as embodiments of the classical tragic hero, as envisioned by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Such is the greatness of Indian epics that portray humans who rise to the position of Gods due to their virtuous life and Gods who take human births and, as a result, endure human ordeals.

Ramayana narrates the story of the life and trials of Rama, the prince of Ayodhya. The word 'Ramayana' means Rama's Ayana which translates as, 'the journey of Rama'. The epic is divided into 7 books, each of which is called 'Kanda'. It narrates the major events of Rama's life; Lord Vishnu's incarnation as the son of King Dasaratha, the King naming him Rama, his youth and education at Vashishta's gurukul, his marriage to Sita, his exile, Sita's abduction, war between Rama and Ravana, Sita's chastity test, their return and Rama's coronation, Sita's chastity being questioned again, Rama abandoning her, Sita's departure and finally Rama's ascent to heaven.

Rama despite being an incarnation of lord Vishnu possesses all the flaws of a human being. According to Hindu scriptures, even Gods can't escape the imperfections of human life once they take human form. Rama is the protagonist of the Hindu epic *Ramayana* and is considered the seventh incarnation of lord Vishnu. He is born to King Dasharatha and his wife Kausalya in the kingdom of Ayodhya. He grows up to be just,

righteous and the upholder of his dynasty's virtue. He weds Sita, the princess of Videha, in a Swayamvar.

Fate plays its role when he is forced to go into exile for 14 years to fulfil his father's promise. At the forest Sita gets abducted by Ravana. Rama slays the demon and reconciles with his wife. He asks her to undergo a trial by fire or Agni Pariksha to prove her purity. She proves her purity and they return to Ayodhya. He assumes the throne and rules over his subjects.

His hamartia is his inability to take a stand. The moment his wife's chastity gets questioned Rama is confused about the right solutions. He is split between his duty towards a pregnant Sita and his duty as the King. He chooses to abandon his wife as he believes that his primary duty is to his people. Considered the embodiment of virtue, he believed it to be his duty to rule justly. This decision marks the beginning of his peripeteia. After abandoning his wife, he feels extreme remorse. When Lakshmana returns from the forest, he sees Rama in a desperate state, "Having entered there he saw his elder brother Rāma seated poorly on an excellent seat with his eyes full of tears" (Dutt, Section LXII). Lakshmana consoles him with his words.

Years later during the Aswamedha yagna, Rama happens to meet his sons in the forest. He reconciles with his wife once again but asks her to prove her chastity once again by entering the fire, for she has spent these many years in a hermitage and as a king he had to prove his wife's purity to his subjects. This time Sita takes her stand and invokes her mother, Bhumi Devi and returns to her womb. Rama thus separated from his wife forever falls to a deeper sorrow. It is when Sita departs that he realises the weight of his choices (anagnorisis). Burdened by the weight of the consequences of his actions, he ruled Ayodhya with a heart that longed for Sita until he renounced his mortal life and returned to his divine abode in Vaikunta. Rama's hamartia leads to a state of profound

personal suffering, where his unwavering commitment to dharma forces him into painful choices. As a king, he was accountable to his subjects. Sita had proved her purity before returning to Ayodhya, with Rama's troupe as her witness. Though Rama makes a decision as a king he is upset and depressed about letting go of a pregnant Sita. His decision pushes him into a state of deep sorrow. Anagnorisis occurs when Sita leaves him forever. On the one hand his story teaches one the righteous way to lead a life on the other it arouses pity and fear. Even an incarnation of God faces the consequences of his decision hence no one can escape the consequences. In the larger context Rama fulfilled the prime duty of his incarnation-to spread the principles of Dharma- but as a hero, he experiences deep sorrow and separation as the result of his choices.

Bali was a Vanara king who ruled over the kingdom of Kishkinda. His story is narrated by Sugriva, his younger brother, who seeks Rama's help in resolving the conflict with his brother. He tells Rama about his brother Bali:

My brother, known by Báli's name,

Had won by might a conqueror's fame.

My father's eldest-born was he,

Well honoured by his sire and me.

My father died, and each sage lord

Named Báli king with one accord;

My father died, and each sage lord

Named Báli king with one accord;

And he, by right of birth ordained,

The sovereign of the Vánars reigned.

He in his royal place controlled

The kingdom of our sires of old,

And I all faithful service lent

To aid my brother's government.

The fiend Máyávi,—him of yore

To Dundubhi his mother bore,—

For woman's love in strife engaged,

A deadly war with Báli waged. (Griffith 1183)

Bali was the elder son of king Riksharajas, he assumes the throne and rules the kingdom with Sugriva's assistance. As a devoted brother Sugriva serves his elder brother. Once the demon Mayavi challenged him for a duel. Both of them enters a cave and Bali asks Sugriva to guard the mouth of the cave. When Bali does not return even after a year Sugriva, believing Bali to be dead returns to the kingdom and takes over the throne.

Inside the cave, Vali had defeated and killed the demon and returned home. Seeing Sugriva acting as king, Vali believes that his brother has deliberately betrayed him in a fit of anger. His impulsiveness fuelled by rage results in him breaking ties with

Sugriva and taking Sugriva's wife as his own. There begins his peripeteia. A banished Sugriva takes refuge in the mount Rishyamuk. When Rama meets Sugriva at the Rishyamuk Mountain and asks for his help to find his wife, Sita, Sugriva replies by telling him about his ill fate. He explains how Bali treated him:

But Báli, though I humbly sued,

Reviled me in his furious mood:

"Out on thee, wretch!" in wrath he cried

With many a bitter taunt beside.

...

Thus Báli spoke in words severe;

And then, unmoved by ruth or fear,

Left me a single robe and sent

His brother forth in banishment.

He cast me out with scathe and scorn,

And from my side my wife was torn. (Griffith 1187-1189)

Rama promises to help Sugriva defeat his brother and reclaim his wife and position. Bali meets his end in the hands of Rama who lets him know his faults. As a king he should have controlled his anger and as an elder brother he should have forgiven his brother. He realises his mistakes and embraces his death.

As a king, Bali was just, virtuous and successful but his impulsiveness along with his misjudgements and his act of taking away his brother's wife contributed to his

downfall. Though he repents for mistreating his brother, the realisation (anagnorisis) occurs in a later stage making it impossible for him to reverse its effects. His life as a just king and his subsequent fall from grace due to his impulsiveness evoke pity and fear in the readers.

Kumbhakarna was the son of Rakshasa princess Kekasi and Vishrava, a Brahmin. He is described as a highly virtuous character. Unlike his younger brother Vibhishana, he never left his elder brother's side. Though he initially warned Ravana against the impending doom and asked Ravana to do the right thing and return Sita, he decides to stay with the rakshasas and defend them. He is aware of Rama's truth but valiantly fought like a virtuous hero and finally submitted to his fate.

When Ravana wakes him from his sleep, to fight Rama, Kumbhakarna advises Ravana:

O Monarch, once so proud,

We warned thee, but thou wouldst not hear;

And now the fruits of sin appear.

We warned thee, I, thy nobles, all

Who loved thee, in thy council hall.

Those sovereigns who with blinded eyes

Neglect the foe their hearts despise,

Soon, falling from their high estate

Bring on themselves the stroke of fate.

Accept at length, thy life to save,

The counsel sage Vibhishan gave,

The prudent counsel spurned before,

And Sítá to her lord restore. (Griffith 1670)

To which Ravana replies with arrogance and pride. He questions Kumbhakarna's loyalty and reprimands him for not taking his elder brother's side. According to scriptures elder brother is to be respected and obeyed by younger siblings, Ravana reminds Kumbhakarna about his duty. Kumbhakarna though wise enough, gives in to Ravana's wishes. If he could not stop his elder brother, he would rather die fighting for him.

Kumbhakarna's hamartia was his lack of conviction. He did not try enough to convince Ravana to do the right thing. Though he gives him his piece of mind, once Ravana dismisses his advice, Kumbhakarna feels bound by duty as a brother and a warrior. Instead of rebelling or refusing to fight, he chooses to support Ravana. Before the battle, Kumbhakarna was in a deep slumber due to Brahma's curse. He was detached from Ravana's war and the consequences of his acts but peripeteia occurs when he awakened from his sleep and asked to fight Rama. This moment also marks his irreversible descent toward death and the moment he steps onto the battlefield, his reversal of fortune is complete. No longer the peaceful, sleeping giant, he becomes a doomed warrior, fighting for a lost cause. Kumbhakarna's anagnorisis is tragic yet heroic. He understands that he is on the wrong side of the war but fights with honour for the sake of his brother and embraces his fate rather than running from it. his downfall is tragic and meaningful leaving a lasting impact. His story is cathartic. Readers feel pity and fear as it shows the effect of misguided loyalty.

Chapter 3

Tragic Heroes from the Mahabharata

यदिहास्तिदन्यत्र।यत्रेहास्तिनतत्कचित्॥ (Adi Parva: 56:33)

Whatever is here is elsewhere; whatever is not here, is nowhere.

Mahabharata embodies the essence of the Indian cultural heritage. It is more than merely a work of literature, its unparalleled greatness comes from the impeccable narrative style, storyline, and structure. It acts as a guide to readers on matters relating to eschatology, afterlife, rebirth and Dharma. Almost everyone across generations has heard and read *Mahabharata* innumerable times, and numerous interpretations have been made, yet every time one reads the text it presents itself in a new light, such is the work's greatness.

In *Mahabharata*, the doctrine of dharma is more powerful than Gods. No one escapes the trials of human birth, thus, we see, even Shree Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu often facing moral dilemmas. Moral laws sustain and favour those creatures who abide by them, they decide their fate in this life and the life afterwards hence all the heroes and antiheroes, to some extent, are morally inclined, making them perfect fit for analysis based on the Aristotelian notion.

Mahabharata narrates the story of the dynastic conflict between the Kauravas and Pandavas, which ends in an internecine war. Historically the Kuru was a Vedic Indo-Aryan tribal union prominent during the Iron Age in the northern part of India. In the epic, the Kuru dynasty is a part of the Lunar dynasty.

Bhishma is the patriarch of the Kuru dynasty and the Supreme commander of Kaurava forces. Named Devavrata at birth, he is the eldest son of King Shantanu and goddess Ganga and was born as the heir apparent to the throne of Hastinapura.

He renounced his status as the heir to the throne taking a vow of lifelong celibacy to facilitate his father's marriage to Satyawati, daughter of a fisherman chieftain. His ability to take severe vows and abide by them added to his glory as one of the most powerful and efficient princes of his time. He dedicated his life to serving the throne, acting as the advisor and guide to his father's successors. When Satyawati and Shantanu's son, Vichitraveerya reaches marriageable age Bhishma takes the task of finding him a bride on himself. While doing what he thought was right he commits the biggest error of his life, one which alters his fate and that of his dynasty. He brings home the three princesses of Kashi, Amba Ambika and Ambalika, without their consent. He proclaims in the king's court:

Some wed with the consent of the maidens, some by drugging them into consent, and some by going unto the maidens' parents and obtaining their sanction. Some again obtain wives as presents for assisting at sacrifices. Of these, the learned always applaud the eighth form of marriage. Kings, however, speak highly of the Swyamvara (the fifth form as above) and themselves wed according to it. But the sages have said that, that wife is dearly to be prized who is taken away by force, after the slaughter of opponents, from amidst the concourse of princes and kings invited to a self-choice ceremony. Therefore, ye monarchs, I bear away these maidens hence by force. (Ganguli 285)

Amba was in love with King Salva, when she expresses her discontent in Bhishma's act, he allows her to leave. Having been abducted by Bhishma, Salva spurns

her, Bhishma too refuses to marry her. She holds him responsible for her misfortune and vows to kill him. She is reborn as Shikandini/Shikandi and participates in the war fighting alongside Pandavas and being instrumental in causing the death of Bhishma.

On the one hand Bhishma efficiently guided the later rulers of Hastinapura, showing them the path of dharma, on the other his unyielding nature resulted in the ultimate catastrophe and shaped the fate of his successors. Even when Satyawati, for whose sake he took the oath requests him to revoke the oath he refuses to do so. when she pleads with him, he says:

I would renounce three worlds, the empire of heaven, anything that may be greater than that, but truth I would never renounce. The earth may renounce its scent, water may renounce its moisture, light may renounce its attribute of exhibiting forms, air may renounce its attribute of touch, the sun may renounce his glory, fire, its heat, the moon, his cooling rays, space, its capacity of generating sound, the slayer of Vritra, his prowess, the god of justice, his impartiality; but I cannot renounce truth. (Ganguli 289)

His unyielding commitment to his oath of celibacy becomes his hamartia. His commitment to stay loyal to his vow blinded him from seeing the consequences of his actions. Had he yielded to the request of his family, the Kuru dynasty would have never branched into two conflicting groups, nor would the war have happened. Since he refused, Satyawati is forced to bring his eldest son born before her marriage to the king. Veda Vyasa, the author of the great epic thus comes to the scene, his appearance arouses disgust among Satyawati's daughters-in-law leading to the birth of Dridarashtra, blind from birth and Pandu, who is born with vitiligo. His elder brother's inability to rule makes him the next ruler, a position which according to scriptures is the birthright of

Dridarashtra. This forms the very reason for the later conflicts between their sons and ultimately the Great Mahabharata War. He realises the weight of his choices much before but is unable to reverse its effects. During the war Bhishma, though aware of the fact that Pandavas were more morally inclined and duty-bound, is forced to side with the Kauravas. Even as the most influential member of the family, his vow ties him to the throne making him helpless in choosing sides. He ends up fighting for those who committed great crimes. His helplessness despite being the patriarch of the family evokes pity and fear, warning one against the long-lasting effects of unyielding nature.

Dronacharya was born as the son of sage Bharadwaja, making him a noble by birth. He befriends the prince of Panchala, Drupada, during his time in his father's ashram where they were both students, this friendship is so crucial in his later life that it is Drupada's unfulfilled promise and his wish to take revenge on him that leads to the major events and ultimate fall of his life. His downfall is initiated by his excessive love towards his son and his inability to let go of worldly desire.

In their youth, the prince of Panchala and the son of Bharadwaja were very close. The prince promises Drona that when he becomes the king, he will help him whenever needed. Thus, Drona having no wealth to sustain his family decides to visit his old friend. Drupada, intoxicated with the pride of wealth dismisses Drona's claim saying,

O thou of dull apprehension, great kings can never be friends with such luckless and indigent wights as thou! It is true there had been friendship between thee and me before, for we were then both equally circumstanced. But Time that impaireth everything in its course, impaireth friendship also. In this world, friendship never endureth for ever in any heart. Time weareth it off and anger destroyeth it too. Do not stick, therefore, to that worn-off friendship. Think not of it any longer. The

friendship I had with thee, O first of Brahmanas, was for a particular purpose. Friendship can never subsist between a poor man and a rich man, between a man of letters and an unlettered mind, between a hero and a coward. Why dost thou desire the continuance of our former friendship? (Ganguli 353)

Born a Brahmin his sole duty was to live an ascetic life, imparting his knowledge to disciples and training them to fit into the various roles they have to play in their respective lives. But Dronacharya at some point starts desiring wealth and comforts for his son. Thus, when insulted by Drupada he leaves, determined to exact revenge at some point. When it's time for his disciples to pay him his preceptorial fee he asks them to capture Drupada and when this task is accomplished by Pandavas, he asks Drupada to leave half his country under his control and rule over the rest. Drupada, now more wrathful and determined to avenge the wrongdoings of Drona conducts a fire-sacrifice to obtain a son capable enough to kill Drona. His son, Drishtadyumna later kills Drona on the 15th day of the Mahabharata war.

Despite being a master of many skills, Drona is unable to win over his desire and love for his son. Pandavas, use this weakness of his, to help Drishtadyumna behead him. Drona being the preceptor of Pandavas was by all means great in warfare and thus difficult to defeat. They make an elephant out of clay name it after his son and beheads it. When they inform him about the beheading of Ashwatthama Drona, mistaking it to be about his son loses his control and is defeated by Drishtadyumna.

His hamartia is his excessive love towards his son and his desire for comfort. His overconfidence in his abilities and his conviction that he is doing the right thing along with his pride and 'putramoh' blinded him from foreseeing the consequences of his actions. In a turn of events (peripetia), he goes from being the chief instructor of the

princes to fighting against his favourite disciple, Arjuna. His Anagnorisis occurs when he is forced to fight against the virtuous side. Drona's story is Cathartic. It shows us the consequences of crossing one's limits and warns us against the lethal effects of excessive attachment. Though a Brahmin by birth and possessor of great knowledge he could not let go of material attachments hence leading to his fall.

Parikshit is Abhimanyu and Uttara's only son. Born on after the death of his own father and Panchali's five sons Parikshit becomes the sole successor of Hastinapur throne. He becomes the target of the Brahmastra released by Ashwatthama while as a foetus in his mother's womb. He is still born and later revived by Sree Krishna. Even before his birth Krishna predicts his future, while cursing Ashwatthama Sree Krishna says,

The heroic Parikshit, attaining to age and a knowledge of the *Vedas* and the practice of pious vows, shall obtain all weapons from the son of Sharadvata. Having obtained a knowledge of all high weapons, and observant of all *kshatriya* duties, that righteous-souled king shall rule the earth for sixty years. More than this, that boy shall become the mighty-armed king of the Kurus, known by the name of Parikshit, before thy very eyes. (Ganguli 3933-3944)

The story of Parikshit's fate is not narrated directly in *Mahabharat*. It is mentioned through the facts narrated to his son, Janamejaya, by Utanka. This becomes the reason for the serpent-sacrifice; the occasion at which the *Mahabharata* story gets narrated.

Having born to the race of Pandavas he grows up virtuous, strictly adhering to the doctrines of Dharma. Yudhishtira abdicates the throne in his favour and Parikshit takes over the rule. His reign is widely praised and according to *Mahabharata* marks the final

years of Dvapara yuga, the third Yuga in the Yuga cycle. The turn of events takes place when he allows Kali Purush to reside in illicitly obtained gold. He does not think twice before helping Kali Purush. His crown was illicitly obtained by Bheema after killing Jarasandha. Since it is a possession belonging to Jarasandha's successors it was illicit and thus Kali Purush enters the King's mind. Later he crosses paths with a meditating sage who does not reply to his enquiry. Due to the ill effects of Kali Purush, he tosses a snake around the sage's Neck. Though the sage forgives him his son is infuriated and curses Parikshit to die of a snakebite in seven days. Parikshit accepts his fate and eventually dies after Thakshaka bites him.

Parikshit was indeed a dutiful and diligent king but his impulsiveness becomes his hamartia. He pardons Kali Purush without thinking twice. He blindly follows his judgements and underestimates the consequences of helping Kali Purush which later lead to the events that ends in his death. He goes from being a prosperous king who lives in the palace to having to live solitarily in a mansion to escape snakebite. During his end days he realizes the he realizes the inescapable nature of fate (anagnorisis). His downfall evokes pity and fear and cautions one against the dangers of impulsiveness. Parikshit's inability to escape his fate serves as a poignant reminder of the inexorable nature of destiny.

Chapter 4

Breaking the Conventions: Women as Tragic Heroes

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः। (Manusmriti)

Where women are honoured, divinity blossoms there, and where ever women are dishonoured, all action no matter how noble it may be, remains unfruitful.

Aristotle in *Poetics* writes, "Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character: the character will be good if the purpose is good. This rule is relative to each class. Even a woman may be good, and also a slave; though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless. The second thing to aim at is propriety. There is a type of manly valour; but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate" (Aristotle 16-17). According to him, the social order of Ancient Greece is organised with slaves at the bottom, then women, then male children and finally men at the top of the heap.

Eastern culture in general, and Indian culture in particular, has always held women in high regard. Women are celebrated not only for their beauty and devotion but also in their 'shakti form or as the "Universal Power" that underlies and sustains all existence. In *Mahabharata* there is a segment in Vana Parva where Yudhishtira asks sage Markandeya about the complex subtle substance of the place of women in the ordering of life, the sage then replies:

That a woman carries a child in her womb for ten months and gives birth at the ripe time, what can be more awesome than that? Often with danger to her life a woman bears a child, gives birth in great pain, and brings up her children with tender care-this seems to me to be even more difficult.

Still more difficult, indeed exceedingly difficult, is how women look after a husband who is uncaring and cruel, from whom they receive only insulting behaviour, and yet, regardless, they live in the truth of their own dharma. (qtd. in Badrinath 29)

Their part in ancient Indian works is not simply that of heroines and their roles are not limited to being the male protagonist's companion, they are independent, powerful and have a stand of their own. Female characters of Indian epics are so powerful that they often emerge as divine challengers, capable of questioning and even cursing the Gods.

As against Aristotle's theory in which he excludes women from being tragic heroes, Indian mythology is full of female characters who possess all the qualities of a hero. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* put forward a bunch of female characters who are of noble birth, morally inclined, flawed and play an equally important role in the plot. Their decisions become crucial in the progression of the story. Draupadi's oath becomes the catalyst for the Mahabharata war, Kaikeyi's boons alter the fate of the Raghu clan in *Ramayana*, Tara, Shakuntala, Damayanti, Satyawati, Aditi and many more powerful female characters form the core of Indian mythologies.

Tataka is a demoness who appears in the Bala Kanda of *Ramayana*. Her story narrated by Sage Vishwamitra while he travels through the forest along with Rama and Lakshmana. Vishwamitra arrives at Ayodhya to request King Dasharatha to send his son Rama to protect his yajna from demons. Though hesitant he sends Rama along with Lakshmana to serve Vishwamitra. While travel through the dense forest Vishwamitra tells Rama and Lakshmana about the cursed forest where the demoness Tataka resides. As they reach the cursed forest, Vishwamitra narrates the story of Tataka's origin. She was born to a yaksha, Suketu, who was childless for years. Lord Brahma grants him a

beautiful baby girl and blesses her with strength of thousand elephants. Vishwamitra narrates:

Táḍaká named, most fair to see,

A pearl among the maids was she,

And matched, for such was Brahmá's dower,

A thousand elephants in power. (Griffith 128)

He then narrates the events that lead to her curse:

A giant, through a curse, became.

She, widowed, dared with him molest

Agastya, of all saints the best.

Inflamed with hunger's wildest rage,

Roaring she rushed upon the sage.

When the great hermit saw her near,

On speeding in her fierce career,

He thus pronounced Máricha's doom:

"A giant's form and shape assume."

And then, by mighty anger swayed,

On Táḍaká this curse he laid:

"Thy present form and semblance quit,

And wear a shape thy mood to fit;

Changed form and feature by my ban,

A fearful thing that feeds on man. (Griffith 129)

She grew up as a Yakshini and the married Sunda, who is cursed to death by Sage Agastya. Widowed she decides to take revenge by attacking Agastya. In a fit of anger, she forgets the greatness of the Sage and attacks him. Agastya curses her in return, transforming her to a man-eating monster. She loses her divine beauty and is doomed to misuse her power. She lives the rest of her life as a demoness, feeding on ascetics and disturbing their sacrificial rituals, until she meets Rama.

As Vishwamitra completes his narration Tataka attacks the trio. She engages in a long fight with Rama and is slayed by him.

Tataka's hamartia is her impulsiveness which led to her downfall. Fuelled by rage she attacks a great Sage without a second thought. This leads to her fall from a celestial being to a man-eating monster. As a Yakshini, she had a noble birth but instead of ruling the nobility she becomes a figure of terror. Even after being cursed, she does not let go of her rage she vows to take revenge on the ascetic community. She realises her helplessness in front of destiny only towards the end, but it is too late for her to repent. One sympathizes with Tataka and realizes the need to keep one's emotions in check and not act impulsively.

Devayani's story is narrated in the Adi Parva of *Mahabharata*. She is the daughter of Sukracharya (noble birth). Growing up as the daughter of the preceptor of asuras, she had access to great knowledge, wisdom and power. Her tragedy grows from her idealism and desire for love. She took great pride in her position as the acharya's daughter and failed to realise that there were things out of her control. She fell in love with Kacha who was the disciple of her father and when he refuses her proposal, she

curses him and in turn becomes subject to his curse which led to the tragedies in her later life.

Sukracharya knew the secret of bringing the dead to life which he used to bring back Asuras to life every time they were defeated. In order to extract this knowledge from him Devas seek Kacha's help. As the disciple of Sukracharya Kacha served him and was attentive to his daughter as well. Devayani soon develops an affection towards him which later blooms into love. Every time Asuras, who knew his intentions, tried to kill Kacha, Devayani persuaded her father to revive him, unaware of the fact that he did not reciprocate her love. In one such instance Sukracharya has no option but to reveal the Sanjeevani mantra to Kacha. Having achieved his goal he prepares to return at that moment Devayani asks him to take her hand in marriage. Kacha lets her know that he does not see her as a partner for she is his acharya's daughter. He says:

'Thou art to me an object of regard and worship even as thy father! O thou of faultless features, thou art, indeed, even an object of greater reverence! Thou art dearer than life to the high-souled Bhargava, O amiable one! As the daughter of my preceptor, thou art ever worthy of my worship! As my preceptor Sukra, thy father, is ever deserving of my regards, so art thou, O Devayani! Therefore, it behoveth thee not to say so. (Ganguli 224)

Devayani, having had everything she wanted in her life could not take the rejection (hamartia). Though Kacha never expressed his love or deceived her into believing that he loved her she believes that he is supposed to reciprocate her love. At that moment she loses her control and curses him. Kacha justifies his actions:

I have refused thy request only because thou art the daughter of my preceptor, and not because thou hast any fault. Nor hath my preceptor in

this respect issued any command. Curse me if it please thee. I have told thee what the behaviour should be of a Rishi. I do not deserve thy curse, O Devayani. But yet thou hast cursed me! Thou hast acted under the influence of passion and not from a sense of duty. (Ganguli 225)

He curses her in return, that her desire would never be fulfilled. The curse becomes the catalyst for Devayani's downfall and reversal of fortunes (*peripeteia*). Later in her life she marries King Yayati with whom she has a failed relationship. Sharmishta, her dearest friend becomes her nemesis. Her role as a mother and wife to Yayati doesn't bring the fulfilment she sought, and she finds herself estranged from the king. Her final years are marked by loneliness and tragic resignation.

A highly virtuous daughter and wife, Gandhari was born as the princess of Gandhara (noble birth) and later becomes the queen of Hastinapur after her marriage to Dhritarashtra. When she hears that her parents have consented to marry her to Dhritarashtra, despite him being blind, she happily agrees to their wish and out of love and respect for her future husband, blindfolded her own eyes. She later gives birth to a ball of flesh which is then divided into hundred and one pieces which develops into Duryodhana and his hundred siblings, who are referred to as Kauravas.

Though Gandhari blinded herself out of loyalty towards her husband determined to share his pain and inabilities, she fails to foresee the consequences of her decision. This becomes her *hamartia* (tragic flaw), instead of being the light in his life and guiding him through his blindness, she chose to blind herself. Dhritarashtra, blind from birth was naturally capable of overcoming the challenges faced due to his shortcomings. Gandhari having chosen such a fate half way through was definitely not completely ready to face its challenges. Thus, she fails to guide her sons to the path of Dharma. She believes that

she is doing the right thing. She does not reconsider her decision and stays blind till the very end.

Gandhari's life was indeed a penance in which she renounced the greatest comfort of her life, she definitely is resilient and virtuous. But given her circumstances she had an option to choose a different path, to be the guiding light of her family. Rather than filling in the role her husband was incapable of fulfilling she chooses to emulate his inabilities thus leading to tragic downfall of her sons and herself. She chose a path she thought was the best what she did not realise was that by blinding herself she was blinding her sons too. Gandhari's nemesis is her son Duryodhana. Her inability to control her son's actions or to prevent the war serves as the catalyst to her downfall and gradually led to the turn of events (peripetia). From being the queen of Hastinapur and mother of great warrior sons she becomes helpless and witnesses her sons being killed one after the other in the Mahabharata war. Her inability to stop her children from committing sins results in the downfall of her family and the destruction of everything she held dear. Her story shows how decisions taken without proper consideration renders one powerless.

Conclusion

The application of Aristotle's tragic hero framework to the Mahabharata and Ramayana demonstrates the universality of tragic narrative, which cuts across cultural and temporal boundaries. The Indian epics and their Greek counterparts transcend their cultural origins to serve as monuments to the tragic beauty of the human condition. Indian epics fit perfectly into elements of the Aristotelean theory revealing the fact that in many respects, the East and the West perceive the world in the same way.

The scope of Mahabharata and Ramayana as core texts for research is vast. But it has not been used to its full potential. When Western epics are evaluated based on various theories, Indian epics often do not receive fitting consideration. This leads to a huge research gap in this area. This dissertation was an attempt to compare and analyse Indian epics using one of the foremost Western theories. Although based on the Greek tragedies, Aristotle's theory feels tailor-made for the Indian epics.

While its classical definitions have evolved, the essence of the tragic hero continues to shape narratives across different cultures and historical periods. Aristotle pioneered the field of Tragic hero theory which later on was carried forward by philosophers like Julius Bahnsen, Andreas Dorsche, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and the like. Arthur Miller redefines the idea of the tragic hero in modern terms. His essay "Tragedy and the Common Man" argues that tragedy is not limited to nobles, but can also apply to ordinary individuals. He claimed that common people could also struggle against forces beyond their control, making their downfall just as tragic.

One of the purposes of the project was to show how Aristotle's theory has a universal appeal, which is proved by the fact that the Indian epic heroes align perfectly with the essence of a tragic hero. Though not explicitly labelled, many Indian epic heroes

fit the archetype due to their high status, tragic flaws, immense suffering, and ultimate downfall.

This work also challenges the convention of considering only men as worthy of being tragic heroes and limiting women to a position just above slaves. In chapter four the spotlight is placed on women of Indian epics who are no less than their male counterparts. It successfully proves that in India, unlike in Greece, powerful female characters were present from an early age.

In the analyses of characters from *Ramayana* in terms of Aristotle's theory, they emerge as perfect tragic heroes with tragic flaws. While Rama's Hamartia is his inability to take a stand, Bali faces downfall due to his impulsiveness. Kumbakarna falls due to his lack of conviction.

While using Aristotle's theory to analyse Bhishma, Drona and Parikshit, whose stories are part of *Mahabharata* we see them perfectly fitting into the tragic hero archetype. Bhishma's unyielding commitment to his oath becomes his hamartia leading to the subsequent dynastic conflict. Drona despite being a Brahmin and a scholar could not let go of his desires. This, along with his excessive love for his son becomes his hamartia. Parikshit is the successor of Pandavas. Despite being a dutiful and diligent king, his impulsiveness leads to his downfall.

When female characters from Indian epics are revisited with the frame of Aristotelian Tragic hero, going beyond the limits set by Aristotle, who considered women unfit to become heroes we see that, Tanka from the *Ramayana* and Damayanti and Gandhari from the *Mahabharata* perfectly fit into the tragic hero archetype. His views on women were based on the conventions of Greek society. But in the Indian context women held a high position since the time of these epics. It also highlights the difference in the treatment of women in the Greek and Indian literary spheres

Thus, the application of Aristotle's tragic hero theory on the vast expanse of Indian epics highlights the universality of human storytelling. In addition to structural similarities, the fusion of Eastern narrative tradition and Western classical theory reveals a common philosophical perspective on fate, morality, and human action.

Works Consulted

- Aristotle. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Translated by S. H. Butcher,
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>.
- Badrinath, Chaturvedi. *The Women of the Mahabharata*. Orient Longman Private Limited, 2008.
- Barstow, Marjorie. 'Oedipus Rex as the Ideal Tragic Hero of Aristotle'. *The Classical Weekly*, vol. 6, no. 1, Oct. 1912, pp. 2-4.
- Bose, Mandakranta, editor. *The Ramayana Revisited*. OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2Ar2Qfr-UeQC&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=RAMAYANA&ots=bflM0acJyS&sig=YgwRXx6-WlpdaerVILL19jRcibl&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=RAMAYANA&f=false.
- Engle, Eric. 'Aristotle, Law and Justice: The Tragic Hero'. *NORTHERN KENTUCKY LAW REVIEW*, vol. 35, no. 1, Apr. 2008, p. 1,
<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1125782>.
- Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, translator. *THE MAHABHARATA of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*. Prabhat Prakashan.
- Golden, Leon. 'The Purgation Theory of Catharsis'. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1973, pp. 473-79. JSTOR,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/429320>.
- Griffith, Ralph, translator. *The RÁMÁYAN of VÁLMIKI*. 2008,
www.gutenberg.org/files/24869/24869-h/24869-h.html.
- Marshall, Paul. "Kipling's 'The Ballad of East and West' is Hardly Racist."
Providence, 7 Aug. 2018.

Miller, Arthur. "Tragedy and the Common Man." *The New York Times*, 27 Feb. 1949.

Murthy. "A Note on the Ramayana." *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 6, 2003.

Nath Dutt, Manmatha, translator. *The Project Gutenberg eBook of the Rāmāyana, Volume 4. Uttara Kānda*. 1894, www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/62496/pg62496-images.html#section-xli.

Reeves, Charles H. 'The Aristotelian Concept of the Tragic Hero'. *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 73, no. 2, 1952, pp. 172–88. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/291812>.