

An Examination of the Diverse Interpretations of the Epic through the Paradigm of Queer Theory and the Contradiction of the Self and Society

Dr. Prakash A¹, Dr. S. Sarayu Priyadarshini², Dr. Abirami T³, Dr. Giriraj Kiradoo⁴, Dr. Bairavi B⁵, Mariappan B⁶, Priyadarshini M.C.⁷, Dr. P. Jayakumar⁸, Dr. Saravana Selvakumar. R⁹, & Dr. S. Janneker Lawrence Daniel¹⁰

¹ Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Joseph's College of Engineering, OMR, Chennai- 600119, Tamil Nadu, India

³ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

⁴ Associate Professor, Department of Management and Technology, Engineering College Bikaner, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India

⁵ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

⁶ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Ramakrishna Engineering College, Coimbatore -641022, Tamil Nadu, India

⁷ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

⁸ Assistant Professor, St. Joseph's College of Engineering, OMR, Chennai- 600119, Tamil Nadu, India

⁹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, G. Venkataswamy Naidu College (Autonomous), Kovilpatti- 628 502, Tamil Nadu, India

¹⁰ Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai – 627002, Tamil Nadu, India

Correspondence: Priyadarshini M.C., Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Abstract

The article is of the conceptual epilogue, which provides a concise elucidation by delineating distinct sets of correlations. It examines the gender dichotomy, obscured self, and Marginalization of the selected characters in the reinterpreted works of Mahabharata. "Queer is an umbrella term for those individuals who are not only deemed sexually deviant but are made to feel marginalised due to standard social practices. It is a site of permanent becoming" (Giffney, 2004, p. 67). This study draws upon the post-modernist technique of reinterpretation to examine and reflect upon stereotypes, authority, and sexist values in Queer perspective. It also aims to challenge and mitigate gender distinctions, emotional perception, and the facilitation of women's thoughts and understanding. By giving voice to marginalised characters, the authors explore their ongoing struggle with the complexities of sex and gender, the rigidity between personal desires and societal obligations, and the intricate interplay between individual and collective truths. In doing so, they present a myriad of potential subjectivities and imaginative possibilities that shed light on contemporary issues surrounding Identity and self-perception.

Keywords: Queer theory, gender, feminism, suppression, myth, self, and Society

1. Introduction

Indian mythology is a veritable wellspring of India's rich cultural heritage. From its primordial origins, it has a captivating narrative that expands a vast array of existence, encompassing the most profound facets of spirituality, belief systems, intellectual illumination, the pursuit of knowledge, and the cultivation of wisdom. The profound wealth contained within this literary masterpiece has firmly established its distinctive position within the realm of literature. It is an all-encompassing compendium, meticulously detailing the intricate intricacies of societal norms and behavioural protocols. This invaluable knowledge is perpetuated through the ages, either through written texts or the oral tradition of passing down wisdom from one generation to the next.

The religious and cultural dimensions inherent in Indian Society possess a profound capacity to significantly influence the ethical framework that governs the daily lives of its inhabitants. Prevailing as an influence, eccentric myths manifest as nuance. However, the eccentric myth's consequential components are approved within the collective consciousness.

The Mahabharata of Krishna, the erudite sage Dwaipayana Vyasa, expounds upon the profound significance of time that governs the fabric of existence in the Society. 'Society' implies the interconnection between individuals who construct and revitalise a purposeful

structure. It effectively governs and manages the behaviour. The intricate fabric of societal dynamics and interconnectedness manifests as a complex framework that continually adapts and evolves in response to human behaviour and the ever-shifting tides of time. Since the time of evolution till today, man has been a part of Society for his survival and welfare. As Aristotle (384 BC) expressed, "Man is essentially a social animal by nature" (Politics, 1981, p. 85). So, he has to abide by the social codes to fulfil all his needs and to ensure his security. Hence, Man and Society are closely interconnected and interdependent, sharing a bilateral relationship. Society provides him with psychological safety, social recognition, love, self-actualisation, and intellectual development.

Carl Jung (1875), in his study on depth psychology, suggested that these mythical stories interlink individuals and societies with collective unconsciousness, interacting with the vast unseen world. Romanian thinker Mircea Eliade (1907) theorised that myth explains how individuals make sense of their world and behaviour. In the preface of *Andhayuga* (1954), Dharamveer Bharati, in his work, states: There is an intoxication to accept the challenge of the roaring ocean of darkness, to face the rolling waves empty-handed, to descend into unmeasurable depths. And then, put oneself in all dangers of faith, light, truth, and modesty. To collect, save, to take some particles to the surface- in this intoxication, so much pain and pungent pleasure mix that the mind becomes helpless to taste it (Bharati, 2004, p. 131). According to the civilisations, the epics take on new hues, gain new characters and plots, and change their structure. Mythology serves as a common ground for readers of contemporary Indian English novels. An approach to expressing one's perspective on modern life through art. These contemporary authors have brought them up to date, highlighting the timeless value of these classics of Indian literature and culture.

In an innovative approach, these contemporary authors have reworked the classic tales more sensitively while using alternative narratives. These works challenge the popularly held assumptions about the great Indian by deconstructing the established and generally accepted images of traditional characters and attempting to show them a more human and individual perspective. These retellings involve distinct characters who are complicated and emotionally marginalised in the original work. The select characters help to expose identification, prejudice, and marginalisation concerns. The characters bring attention to these topics from the past to the present.

In the early 1990s, a new branch of post-structuralism called "queer theory" arose. Existing hegemonic notions of social norms and taxonomies are dissected and rethought in this branch of study. Considering several dimensions of exploitation and privilege, it delves into questions of sexuality, political power, and the status of the literary underdog. Since queer theory encompasses more than just sexuality, it may be applied to various fields and provide fertile ground for novel interpretations. "Queer is, by definition, whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence." (Halperin, 2003, p. 62).

This analysis focuses only on the gendered features of Queer theory and not its physical implications. Although sex and gender are two fundamental aspects of human existence, they are frequently used interchangeably. The term "sex" refers to the biological characteristics of a person that are influenced by their anatomy and decided by hormones, chromosomes, and how they communicate with Society. However, because gender identity is rooted in an individual's inner perception of who they are, their sex and gender may not always coincide. Hobart Staller first used the phrase "gender identity" in 1964. It refers to a person's internal sense of self and personal views on their gender, as opposed to the rigid idea of binary opposition. This study sheds light on the prejudice against transgender (queer) people unsuitable for the patriarchy and social institutions that force people to identify as one gender.

2. The Marginalization of Queers in Contemporary India

Marginalisation may adversely affect individuals' mental, emotional, and physical health. Such individuals are frequently isolated and suffer from anger, dread, depression, anxiety, sadness, and a lack of purpose. According to the Encyclopedia of Public Health, marginalisation is excluded from the privilege and authority in the centre.

Social Marginalization relegates them to lower social status based on caste, race, or ethnicity. The marginalisation has been negatively regarded with their social image by designating them as criminals, ex-criminals, or rebels, depriving them of social sympathy. When this is applied to the queer, their sexuality is observed as obscenity, and their existence in society is deemed to be inappropriate and unappealing.

Political Marginalization means individuals are denied equal access to formal power structures and involvement in decision-making processes. This results in political exclusion and encourages hegemony, using force among dominant groups to bring about disempowerment and subjection. This level confines them to a category of insider on the outside and alienates them from that group. As a stranger who enters a society from the outside and continues to exist on the society's margins, this creates a separate and somewhat confused personality in character.

Robert E. Park defines the term "marginalised man: Stuck in between the margin of two cultures and societies which never adopt him completely." The predestination that dooms him to simultaneously play the part of a cosmopolitan and a foreigner in the two realms in which he resides. (Park, 1928, p 881-893). The ability to actively participate left them indifferent and suspicious. It also prevented them from gaining equal access to the rights associated with education and training. Since the queers are socially unaccepted, they are also subjected to political deprivation. Their subjugation is vindicated both politically and socially. As the bare existence of the queer itself is bigoted, their exertion of political authority and involvement is observed to be deplorable. Therefore, they are torn between the factors to either accept their identity or wait for society's approval to engage with the political regime.

As a social being, one's Identity must consider their connections to others. Giddens (1991) has defined the importance of the active nature of Identity in his conception of self-identity. Social identities must change in nature but still have stable and fixed characteristics. As Kellner (1992) has defined in the contemporary world, the structure of interaction is defined socially and is framed with norms, customs, and expectations. To gain Identity, one must choose and reduce among them. (142)

Social Identity refers to how an individual's existence is socially classified or designated by others. Social Identity encompasses a collection of shared attributes bestowed upon an individual as a societal label or status. These identities typically consist of characteristics that an individual ascribes to themselves based on the perceptions and judgments of others, thereby rendering them a social entity. Alexander Wendt, in his work *Collective Identity Formation and the International State* (1994), defines identities as, "Social identities are at once cognitive schemes that enable an actor to determine 'who I am/we are' in a situation and position in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations" (Wendt, 1994, p. 395). Even if the existence of queer is waved off yet the ability of society to accept them as a part of it is challenging. Society neglects their existence to its margins and strips off their ability to be content with their identity. The queers are subjected to live in disgust and contempt about their personalities and are forced to embrace the labels unsuitable and unwanted.

Social exclusion is a term used to describe the systematic process by which individuals are deliberately kept disconnected or marginalised by those in positions of authority or influential groups. This concept was developed in Europe during the 1980s. Exclusion may arise from various societal, economic, cultural, political, or emotional influences. It suggests the presence of a societal structure in which hierarchies are prominently established, potentially leading to negative consequences for individuals in terms of disrespect, devaluation, and stigma. These consequences can result in excluding one's Identity and the need for acknowledgement and esteem. In this process, individuals experience restricted or absent access to fundamental opportunities and resources readily available to individuals belonging to a privileged class. The act of excluding or depriving individuals within a particular group goes against the principles of social integration and respect for human rights. Social rejection, when instigated, can elicit profound psychological consequences, manifesting as exclusionary encounters that may detrimentally influence an individual's behavioural and emotional well-being, potentially leading to diminished self-esteem. Exclusion can manifest in intergroup contexts, wherein individuals may face rejection from their peer group or individuals due to prejudice or affiliation with a particular victimised group, such as ethnicity, nationality, culture, socioeconomic status, or religion.

3. The History of Queers in India

The queers in the Vedic era held superior positions at social, political, and cultural levels. Society never looked down upon them. Instead, their presence and knowledge were highly regarded by the aristocrats and the celestial beings. Hindu mythology records the presence of queer even in divine beings. Therefore, the queers were never marginalised in the Vedic era, and the aristocrats took their records in the mythology as a creed in the following eras. After the Vedic era came the Hindu empire, where the queers were given a political position in the palace. Their advice and involvement not only in the political regime but also in the personal lives of the royals were highly regarded.

Trans women have been given greater recognition in Indian Society. Aravanis, Jogappas and Hijras assert that their ancestry comes from some form of heavenly manifestation. To this day, transgender women in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu refer to themselves as Aravanis, after the wives of Aravan, the son of Arjuna, and the serpent princess from the Mahabharata. Aravan was married to the princess of the serpents. According to a story from the Mahabharata, Krishna fulfilled Aravan's final wish by marrying him after transforming himself into a woman named Mohini. This was done so that the Pandavas could sacrifice Aravan for them to triumph over the Kauravas. During the 'nirvana' of the castration ceremony, the Hijras, who are trans women, invoke Bahuchara-mata, another goddess from legend. This religio-cultural acceptability has had an influence and made trans-feminine people more visible in our Society. This aspect serves as the prospect for their presence in auspicious rituals like weddings, the naming of children, orientation of business collaboration, etc. (Kala, 2016, p. 26)

In the Mughal Empire, the queers were given the position of advisors and the authority to enter the personal space of both the king and queen. However, the previous glorious positions were stripped after the fall of the Mughal Empire. They were doubly marginalised than the women in the Society. Their existence was regarded as a curse, and they were isolated from Society with the label: Hijras, Aravans, Aravani, Jogappa, homos, etc. And in the modern era, their life degraded to a level where they were perceived as mere sexual objects. Regarding Marginalization, the queers were marginalised socially, politically, and culturally. Evidence with historical and cultural roots can be used to challenge the patriarchal and heteronormative societal institutions that have neglected and oppressed trans men and people with trans-masculine identities in contemporary India.

Patriarchal assumptions have been used to interpret the scant historical and mythological accounts and evidence of trans males that do exist. Somewhat, trans males have been misinterpreted as lesbians, perhaps reflecting Society's reluctance to acknowledge someone labelled female at birth as a man. It has contributed to the general public's lack of awareness of trans males. Even today, transgender people are often solely associated with trans women in the minds of the general public. To remind modern culture of the existence of transmasculine individuals and the telling of narratives about them, trans men must assert their place in Indian mythology. From 300 BC through the 21st century, the transgender rights movement faced several challenges.

Atrocities, prejudice, humiliation, and other mistreatment were all suffered by this ignored group. The government still hasn't been

able to give them the safety and assistance they need, even after the 2014 Supreme Court ruling. We owe them a great deal as a system or civilisation. At the same time, the idea of a gender spectrum may seem like a recent development; stories of heroes who defied the norms of their time can be found throughout Hindu literature and mythology. In contrast to most Western religions, Hinduism has always seen homosexuality as a natural behaviour, and accounts of homosexuality may be found in folklore and sacred literature. In Indian mythology, there are countless accounts of people of all genders and sexual orientations. Our epics are rife with parallels. Looking back, we may observe how these individuals challenge traditional gender roles.

Transgender people have a long and illustrious history in Hindu mythology, including deities and legendary heroes. Despite this, they often face discrimination because of their gender expression. Only relatively recently have they been granted access to social services and the opportunity to participate in the Society fully. Furthermore, these people are vulnerable to physical and mental health problems due to the biases and stigmas they face daily. Substance abuse, legal issues, and a lack of employment opportunities contribute to this predicament. The inclusion of this underrepresented group is crucial.

These stories and folklore of Indian mythology date back thousands of years. Most of them describe reincarnations or transformations of gods who took the guise of women at some point in their stories. Lord Shiva, in his Ardhanarishwara form, is half-woman; Lord Vishnu transforms into Mohini to charm Bhasmasura (a demon and save the Devas (Gods); Lord Shiva transforms into an older woman to assist in the delivery of the child of a devotee; and, according to one of the legends, Lord Krishna dresses like a woman to appease Radha. According to mythology from the eastern part of India, the narrative of Goddess Kali becoming Krishna could be the only example of a Trans masculine heavenly change. Being the reincarnation of Gods may have given Trans feminine people and Trans women greater credence of divinity and, as a result, greater visibility in the religious and cultural landscape of the Indian subcontinent. Hindu mythology traces back to the glorious period of the queers and throws new light on their life and existence. Though Mahabharata delineates the concept of male virility through wars and ego clashes, it projects the coexistence of the queers in Society, and their role is not degraded or disregarded. The epic explains gender fluidity through celestial incarnations, blessings, and boons. The presence of queers in Contemporary Society is contradictory to the Vedic Society. For a profound meaning, it is essential to discuss the queerness that is projected in the Mahabharata epic. The Mahabharata delineates the coexistence of human beings without gender repressions. The epic embraced the fluidity and gender dichotomy and revealed an India that is tolerant and inclusive of various people. For a better perspective on the queerness of the Vedic Society, it is essential to analyse the queer characters in Mahabharata.

4. Queer Theory

'Queerness' encompasses and conceptualises the enforced ideals of social norms and taxonomies. In addition, it analyses the many facets of the topic at hand and sheds light on the connection between power dynamics and recognition. It deconstructs the inflexible ideals now held by Society and the unbending conceptions that do not effectively deconstruct the many attitudes, natures, or circumstances individuals go through. It is common practice to interchange the terms sex and gender, although these two fundamental aspects of human existence are entirely distinct. The biotic elements of an individual are referred to as their sex. These aspects are produced by an individual's chromosomes, hormones, and the interaction between these three factors. On the other side, the idea of gender identity is dependent on an individual's own private and inward sense of themselves. Instead of serving as an identity to people in Society, queer theory is more of a framework that can help people navigate these challenges. "Queer is an umbrella term for those not only deemed sexually deviant but also would describe those who feel marginalised due to standard social practices. It is a site of permanent becoming" (Giffney, 2004, p. 34).

India and its culture were far more accepting before the British colonised it. About Indian mythology, Pattanaik quotes: There are stories of men who become women and women who become men, of men who create children without men, and of creatures who are neither this nor that but a small quantity of both. It is expected to deny the existence of such fluidity in our stories or point to law books that, besides endorsing patriarchy and castes, also frown upon queer behaviour (Pattanaik, 2014, p.12). There is no reason to assume that gender should also remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex where gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it (Butler, 1993, p.154).

4.1 Mythology and Queers

Indian mythology is an accumulation of philosophy, ideology, doctrine, and principles. Contents, concepts, and modern frameworks of ideology in contemporary Society were previously inscribed in the epics and myths. Rabindranath Tagore (1912), in his work *Bharatvarshe Itihaser Dhara* states, "The Mahabharata is not merely a magnificent epic, it is our national history. And it is not the history of an individual, but the spontaneously created natural, historical record of a nation" (Tagore, 2013, p. 62). As Mahabharata records the history of the Indian nation, one can quickly identify the presence of queer and their dealing with Society. The classic tales of mythology and folklore have been passed down through the generations primarily by oral storytelling, in addition to being retold in other languages and rewritten multiple times. Retellings and subsequent translations have been impacted by shifting societal practices and ideas. The viewpoints of those who have retold the story have occurred throughout different periods.

4.2 Transgender Perspective on the Puranas

Mohini, the female incarnation of Vishnu, is the first known reference to transgender in Indian Mythology. Enchantress is what the word "Mohini" implies when translated literally. The Mahabharata details the very first appearance of Mohini, which occurred after the gods and asuras had churned the ocean with the help of Vishnu in his guise as the Kurma (tortoise) avatar to get "Amrita," also

known as the elixir of immortality. She was required to use her charm to stop the battle between the devas and the asuras so that she may give the Amrita to the devas. Mohini makes a comeback in the Vishnu Purana when she uses her cunning to save Shiva after he has just bestowed a blessing upon Bhasmasura that will cause anyone whose head he touches to be consumed by flames. In the Linga Purana, the union of Shiva and Mohini (Vishnu disguises woman) says it is the source of Shankara and Narayanan, also known as Hariharan. This tale is also connected to the fact that Shiva and Vishnu were able to have children, which resulted in the birth of Ayyappa (who is also known as Hariharaputra, which translates to "son of Shiva and Vishnu"). Trans masculine identities from mythology and oral folklore transitions have, over time, been chiefly not given proper importance and, as a result, lost over time. They are not as well known in modern times as many trans-feminine mythical figures are. This contrasts the situation with many of the Trans feminine mythological figures. This is essentially a reflection of the deeply ingrained patriarchy that exists within Indian Society. This story elucidates the trans-feminine avatar of Lord Vishnu. Breaking the gender prejudices, the story in Lingua Purana on the union of Shiva and Mohini is instigated as a divine unification. It is not considered obscene, and the result of their unification is not disregarded but given godly recognition.

4.3 Aravan, the Progenitor

One social category taken for granted from ancient times till today is 'gender.' An exciting fact defined by Lorber (1994) comments on this gender issue: "Most people find it difficult to believe that gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life. (Lorber 13). West & Zimmerman (1987) describes gender as a human invention we created, knowingly or unknowingly. The feminist scholar Judith Lorber (1994) analyses the gender system as a system of dominance and power in socially constructed structures. The normative notion of gender places women in the non-political world of home and males in the free world of power and politics.

In Mahabharata, Aravan (in Tamil, literally the son of a snake), the son of Arjuna and Ulupi (a "snake" princess), was offered to be killed for Goddess Kali to ensure the victory of Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war. The only condition was that Aravan should spend the last night of his life as a married man. No woman was willing to marry Aravan, as he would be killed after the marriage. Lord Krishna took the form of a beautiful woman called Mohini and married him. That is why the Hijras of Tamil Nadu call themselves Aravanis, named after Aravan, their progenitor. In Koovagam, Tamil Nadu, there is an 18-day festival every year where the village trans-women dress up as their wives and then mourn for Aravan's death.

The work of Peruntevanar, known as the Parata Venpa, is a Tamil adaptation of the Mahabharata that dates back to the 9th century. In this version, Aravan is mentioned for the first time. That part of the text discusses a unique sacrificial rite known as the "Kalappali." which translates to "sacrifice to the battlefield." It was widely believed that whoever carried out this sacrifice would be guaranteed success on the battlefield within the context of this ceremony. The bravest warriors are required to offer up their lives in front of the goddess Kali to guarantee the success of their faction. Aravan offered to make the ritual sacrifice of himself of his own volition. In the story of Parata Venpa, Aravan begs Krishna to bestow upon him the blessing of a valorous demise on the battlefield. It is thought that Aravan was awarded a second boon, which allowed him to witness the entirety of the 18-day war. The traditional rites are the only place to find the third blessing. This third boon allows Aravan to get married before the sacrifice, which gives him the right to be cremated and receive funerary offerings (bachelors were buried). This boon also gives Aravan the ability to have children. However, not a single woman was interested in marrying Aravan since they were all afraid they would end up as widows. In the interpretation offered by the Kuttantavar sect, Krishna finds a solution to this problem by assuming the shape of Mohini, his female guise, getting married to Aravan, and spending the night with him. The Koovagam version adds that Krishna wept as a widow after Aravan was sacrificed the following day.

After this, Krishna reverted to his natural masculine form and fought the fight in this guise for the remainder of the conflict. In the cult that bears his name and in which he is considered to be the primary deity, Aravanis Aravan is worshipped under the name Kuttantavar. In this region, the marriage of Aravan and Mohini, her widowhood, and mourning following Aravan's sacrifice form the core focus of an annual celebration that lasts for 18 days on either side of the night of the full moon during the month of Cittirai in the Tamil calendar. Reenacting the wedding of Aravan and Mohini is one of the activities that the Alis and the Aravanis (transgender people) participate in at the Koovagam festival. It is commonly thought that all of the Aravanis are married to Aravan; hence, when the sacrifice is reenacted, the Aravanis take on the role of Aravan's widows and express their sorrow over his passing. Transgender in India are not overlooked as confused chromosome beings; instead, they are given an identity and orientation in Indian mythology.

4.4 Arjuna - Brihannala

By questioning the rigidity that is prominent in existing societal structures in the name of gender, sex, or religion, queer theory reveals a revolutionary yet all-encompassing new method of analysing human Identity. The queer theory summons heterosexuality and the deeply rooted concepts of sexuality and gender through psychological theories such as post-structuralism and the works of Judith Butler (1956) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908). This reopens the inquiry into issues relating to human existence and Identity in a more reformative way. In her book "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," Judith Butler defines gender as "the subversion of identity." When Arjuna refused Urvashi's advances, claiming she was like his mother, she cursed him, saying he would lose his masculinity. Indra changed the curse to last for a year of Arjuna's choosing. This worked out well for Arjuna because he remained during the last year of the Pandavas' exile disguised as Brihannala, a dance instructor. He taught the daughter of King Virat

and her companions dancing and music. When King Virata learned who Arjuna was, he gave him his daughter's hand in marriage. King Arjuna turned down the offer because he had served as her tutor and considered her his daughter.

4.5 Shikandini to Shikhandi

Judith Butler (1990), in her work *Gender Trouble*, used the word 'Gender Performativity' to destabilise gender categories and identities. Arguing that gender cannot be determined biologically, Butler explains gender as a social creation: There is no recourse to a body that cultural meanings have not always interpreted; hence, sex could not qualify as a pre-discursive anatomical fact. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along (Butler, 1998, p.56) Shikhandi was a Trans masculine, a queer identity that has often been misinterpreted, and stories like those of Chudala have been downplayed historically and culturally. The interpretations and retellings have mostly implied Shikandini to be a eunuch (castrated male) or sometimes an intersex person or even imply gender ambiguity. In contemporary times, many are still confused about the actual transgression of Shikhandi from woman to man. Devdutt Pattnaik observes. "Shikhandini, who became Shikhandi, is what modern queer vocabulary would call a female-to-male transsexual as her body goes through a particular change genetically. But retellers avoid details and tend to portray them either as a eunuch (castrated male), a male-to-female transgender person (a man who wears women's clothes as he feels like a woman), an intersex hermaphrodite, or simply a man who was a woman (Amba) in his past life. It reveals a patriarchal bias even in the queer space."

In the Mahabharata, Princess Amba committed herself and vowed to exact revenge on Bhishma after being kidnapped by him for his stepbrother and having her marriage proposal refused. Amba was reborn as Shikhandini and given the name of King Drupada. According to the legend, she underwent penance and changed her sex to become Shikhandi. Bhishma recognised him as Shikhandini, Amba reincarnated during the battle of Kurukshetra, and he did not want to engage in combat with a "woman." Bhishma was compelled to lay down his weapons on the ninth day of the battle when Shikhandi rode in Arjuna's chariot. Arjuna attacked Bhishma with his arrows while hiding behind Shikhandi. Shikhandi thus played a crucial role in both the Pandavas' victory, including Kurukshetra and Bhishma's demise. (Somasundaram, 2009, p. 60)

After being kidnapped by Bhishma for his stepbrother and having her marriage proposal turned down by him, Princess Amba ended her life by committing herself to the Mahabharata. She pledged that she would have Bhishma pay for his actions. Shikhandini was bestowed on Amba after being revived as King Drupada. She is said to have undergone a period of self-denial during which she changed her gender and became known as Shikhandi. During the battle of Kurukshetra, Bhishma recognised him as Shikhandini, a reincarnation of Amba, and he refused to fight a "woman." Amba was killed in the battle. On the ninth day of the battle, while Shikhandi was arriving in Arjuna's chariot, Bhishma was compelled to put his swords away. The field of human psychology has developed a chronic propensity for labelling as "queer" anything different or unconventional. Frost's reference to the horse's feelings as "queer" in these lines demonstrates how humans tend to question any unusual or new feelings and label them as strange or eccentric, even though it is a relatively insignificant act.

Arjuna hid behind Shikhandi and ambushed Bhishma with arrows when the latter was distracted. Therefore, Shikhandi played a part in Bhishma's death at the Battle of Kurukshetra, which ultimately led to the victory of the Pandavas because of the social stigma attached to her sexuality. The account of Shikhandi is frequently left out of retellings of the Mahabharata. This is even though she played an essential role in the conflict. On the other hand, Shikhandi was just as human as any other participant in the conflict, and the fact that she was female did not influence her achievements. Shikhandi represents all persons who identify as queer, including gays, lesbians, Hijras, transgender individuals, hermaphrodites, and bisexuals. However, Shikhandi's role in the conclusion of the war between the ninth and tenth days reveals that Shikhandi was neither here nor there as a character throughout that period. She was neither male nor female, but she was the one who brought down the Kauravas. She was the one who brought the Kauravas down (Raveesh, 2013, p. 216).

Even though many people had an unfavourable opinion of her, Shikhandi's sexuality was rarely a problem in her romantic relationships. She was well-liked by everyone, contributing to the Kauravas' success in the war. This further demonstrates that the one thing that will move you forward in life, regardless of whether you identify as male or female or somewhere in between, is your karma. Shikhandi is a symbol of the third gender, even though it may have taken several generations of Indians to realise the significance of the LGBTQ community and to comprehend that our holy writings were highly progressive. Nevertheless, Shikhandi is a symbol of the third gender. After this tale, Shikhandi is revealed to be a natural person who played a pivotal role in Satya's victory. He was an essential figure in the Mahabharata and will continue to be in the future.

The characters, like Shikhandi, reflect and help analyse our Society regarding gender roles and sexual identities as these characters struggle with their own true Identity and gender. Our study is the perfect example of it, which explains the notion of socially constructed gender and how it is re-produced at personal and institutional levels, thereby creating typical hierarchies of power and discrimination by deconstructing the stereotypical notion of how gender is a socially constructed bifurcation, which is historically grounded. These characters expose the gender duality prevalent in Society. Shikhandi, who was meant to be born as a male, takes revenge on Bhishma; being born, the female was forcibly raised as a male. Her character raises the common issues many males and females face, restrained to their physicality or gender. Stuck in between these roles, she struggled to find her real Identity. Later, strategically forced to marry a girl and granted a male genitalia Yaksha, she became a man but was used as a female in the Mahabharata war against Bhishma. This character is not only about transgender roles but also stresses the need to accept the natural

rights of human beings to be what they are and how the assertion for it is in direct contrast or conflict with social gender norms.

According to Ruth Vanita, "women are rarely reborn as men" in Hindu mythology. Even though Amba desired the boon to allow her to become a man, she was reincarnated with the physical characteristics of a woman rather than those of a man. This may suggest that patriarchal bias was present even when these stories were being generated. In the cases of Tran's masculine characters in mythology and folklore, it is interesting to note that the transformation of a woman into a man has typically taken place to appease the other spouse or partner in a romantic relationship. According to the author, this narrative pattern may also be seen in many situations in modern times, namely in marriages that involve two different women. Chitrangada went through a Gender Change so that she could marry Arjun. The Mahabharata does not cover the events between Arjuna, the Pandava prince, and Chitrangada. Chitra, a play by Rabindranath Tagore, tells the story in the play.

Tagore portrays Chitrangada as a fierce warrior dressed in traditional male garb. Arjuna is head over heels in love with her because she is honest and courageous. The gods bestow Chitrangada's father with a daughter rather than a son. He brings her up to be a man and a warrior, and while she is out hunting, she manages to attract the eye of the handsome Arjun. Who has been banished from his realm for twelve years? She is head over heels in love with him, but she is terrified that Arjun would turn his back on her because of her manly appearance (Raveesh, 2013, p. 216)

As a direct consequence, Chitrangada prays to Madan, the deity of love, to endow her with a more feminine appearance. She confronts Arjun this way, and Arjun becomes obsessed with her after seeing her. Arjun finds out about the warrior princess for the first time during an invasion. He is determined to get acquainted with this woman because he considers her exceptional. Chitrangada, who is overjoyed by this development. Madan transforms her back into her previous form, and Arjun's feelings for Chitrangada deepen. As a direct consequence, Arjun adores Chitrangada not for what she appears to be but for who she truly is. The tale of Chitrangada is the most instructive illustration of gender fluidity.

5. Conclusion

The study offers insights into the underlying origins of gender dictum, a concept that emphasises the importance of the individual over gender, prioritises people over societal labels, and advocates for equal freedom irrespective of gender. Recognising and appreciating individuals for their authentic selves is imperative without imposing limitations based on gender stereotypes. Marginalisation encompasses more than just caste or religion; it extends to various dimensions such as sex, gender, age, social status, mental health, and race. The mental well-being of marginalised individuals is adversely affected due to their experience of being treated in an exclusionary manner. These individuals may experience vulnerability due to stress, exploitation, or a heightened paranoia regarding potential negative perceptions and treatment from Society. Contemporary individuals experience adverse consequences in their professional, romantic, and familial relationships. (Nataraj, 2017, p. 521) The societal forces that lack confidence operating under the guise of Dharma or Education make concerted efforts to sever an individual's connection with their fundamental essence. These forces then construct an artificial persona around the individual, compelling them to align their Identity with this constructed facade. Consequently, the individual's inner self is disregarded, leading to internal turmoil.

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Author's Contribution

Author 1 (Dr. Prakash. A): conceptualized and developed the arguments presented in the article and wrote the manuscript.

Author 2 (Dr.S. Sarayu Priyadarshini): contributed to the literature review, validation of the arguments presented.

Author 3 (Dr. Abirami.T): contributed to the development of the arguments, edit and revision of the paper.

Author 4 (Dr. Giriraj Kiradoo): contributed to the edit and revision of the paper.

Author 5 (Dr. Bairavi. B): contributed to the edit and revision of the paper. We, authors, discussed the research findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, reviews and approved the final version of the manuscript. Informed consent Obtained.

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