Interrogating the Stereotypes: A Study of Poile Sengupta's *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled **"Interrogating the Stereotypes: A Study of Poile Sengupta's** *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha So Said Shakuni*** is based on the bona fide research carried out by **Hemant Kumari,** Department of English and Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, under my supervision and submitted to the Central University of Haryana in partial fulfilment for the award of *Master of Philosophy* in English.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work incorporated to this dissertation entitled **Interrogating the Stereotypes: A Study of Poile Sengupta's** *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha So Said Shakuni* is the result of investigations carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Bir Singh Yadav, Associate Professor, Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh, Haryana, India. This work is original and has not been submitted in part or full for any degree or diploma to this or any other University.

Place – Mahendergarh

Date –   **(Hemant Kumari)**

Preface

This dissertation is based on two stereotypes of Shoorpanakha from the *Ramayana* and Shakuni from the *Mahabharata*. Stereotypes present false image of these characters because they are based on the prior assumptions. So parody writings introduce a character in new form and try to break the stereotype. So I tried to deconstruct the images of these two characters.

This dissertation is based on Poile Sengupta's Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So said Shakuni. In this play, two characters from the two great epics are presented on one platform. . I have taken these two marginalized characters and tried to show the injustice to them because since ages we read Ramayana by taking Ram and Sita in centre and Mahabharata by taking Pandavas in centre. These two characters Shoorpankha and Shakuni are presented as villains and victims. I think nobody is completely good and nobody is completely bad. It is social condition which creates negativity in them. I studied the images of these characters by deconstructing them and by taking them as characters of the texts not one as sister of Ravana and other as maternal uncle of Kauravas. In this play, The MAN and the WOMAN are the mouthpieces of these characters.

From the discussion of this dissertation, I find that no character is evil or good; circumstances make him/ her evil. Evilness is not in the nature of a person.

(Hemant Kumari)

Contents

Introduction

Stereotypes are the thoughts that are formally accepted about particular individuals or things. Stereotypes imply the idea of sticking to one's beliefs. These beliefs may or may not portray reality. Stereotypes are originated by individuals or society to differentiate themselves from others and are related with the mentality of the people where they create such rules and regulations or differences which separate them from others. It is a process of understanding of a particular group or individual or society that these stereotypes are created without any awareness. Stereotypes are often confused with prejudices because we take them as prejudices. Like prejudices, a stereotype is based on prior assumption. A *stereotype* is "...a fixed, over generalized belief about a particular group or class of people." (Cardwell 1996).

In social psychology, a stereotype is defined as a thought that can be adopted about a special kind of individuals or different ways of doing things. These thoughts or beliefs may or may not accurately reflect reality. Because of this, people of particular group, caste and religion believe in their set of beliefs and ideas. They follow these beliefs without any objection. These ideas and beliefs can be logical or illogical. The creators create these ideas or belief for their own benefit. After a short span of time, people become habitual of these ideas and beliefs which take the shape of stereotypes.

Stereotyping is a quick process of categorization. It can help in differentiating among different societies, cultures, individuals on the basis of differences that are found among them. Stereotypes also save time of the observer while categorizing various cultures, societies, and even individuals.

By stereotyping we infer that a person has a whole range of characteristics and abilities that we assume all members of that group have. Stereotypes lead to social categorization, which is one of the reasons for prejudice attitudes (i.e. "them" and "us" mentality) which leads to in-groups and out-groups.(MacLeod, 2015, 1)

Basically these illogical ideas are created by a particular society in order to create hegemony over others. They do so to get power. The term *stereotype* is derived from two Greek words stereos, which means "solid" or "firm", and typos, which means "impression". Hence, the term stereotype means to have a solid impression about a particular individual or society.

This term came from the printing trade and was first adopted in 1798 by Firmin Didot to describe a printing plate that was duplicated by typography. The duplicate printing plate was used for printing instead of the original. Similarly, stereotype is used to create an artificial mindset or thinking rather than reality. In 1850 "stereotype" is used as a noun that meant "image perpetuated without change". In 1922 "stereotype" was first used in modern psychological sense by American journalist Walter Lippman in his work *Public Opinion*.

Mostly, stereotypes are taken as discrimination, but both of these concepts are separate. Stereotypes are related with the mental process of a human being and discrimination is a behavioural part of human being. An individual can be different from others on the grounds of their behaviour, but it is not necessary that this will lead to discrimination. Discrimination takes place when an individual knowingly differentiates himself from others on the ground of behaviour. The similarity is that the stereotype is also an intentional mental difference between individuals and society. An advantage of stereotype is that because of these beliefs we enable to respond quickly to situations because we may have had a similar experience before. One

disadvantage is that it makes us ignore differences between individuals. Because we think that all the people who come in this group, caste, culture or race is same. Therefore we think about people that might not be true. The seeds of stereotypes are sown with the idea of gaining power over others.

The first kind of stereotypes is social stereotypes. Society is a group of people who live together. They form rules and regulations to live their lives in a disciplined and civilized manner. Those who do not follow these rules and regulations are called unsocial and uncivilized. Societies form various rules of their own so that they can depict their groups better than others or present them as rather more powerful than others. Hence, they try to get an edge over other groups or societies.

In Mark Twain's (1835-1910*) The Adventures of Hucklebury Finn* (1884), Huck Finn does not follow the rules and regulations of society. Hence, he is considered to be unsocial and uncivilized.

The second kind of stereotypes is racial stereotypes which are illogical and irrational thoughts based on particular race. In racial stereotypes, races of first and second world demoralize the third world races. These types of stereotypes again take place to gain power over others. For example, black people (Africans) are not considered to be active and wise, but are presented as music-lovers, lazy, etc. This is again a racial depiction of black people. These stereotypes are grouping the race together to indicate that everyone who belongs to that race is music-lover and lazy.

Some psychologists argue that it is a "natural" aspect of human behavior, which can be seen to benefit each group because it helps in the long-run to identify with

one's own ethnic group and so find protection and promote the safety and success of the group. There is no evidence for this view, however, and many writers argue that it is merely a way of justifying racist attitudes and behaviors. (MacLeod, 2015, 3)

An example of this is *White Man's Burden* (1899), a poem by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), which depicts racial discrimination. Rudyard Kipling gives more importance to the white race and calls black race as savage and uncivilized. He asks white men to take up the responsibility to civilize the black people.

The third kind of stereotypes is cultural stereotypes. Cultural stereotypes are the thoughts that are based on the culture of a particular country, group, society or a state. These stereotypes exist about a particular country or a culture as a whole. These thoughts are developed only to give a particular culture more importance over others. It is considered that all Muslims and Arabs are terrorists and all black people, who live outside United States, are poor.

For example: In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1597), Shylock is depicted as a cruel, hard-hearted Jew. That was why initially he was considered to be the villain of the play. But the treatment meted out to him shows a very different picture. He is not only physically oppressed but he also suffers mentally.

The next and fourth kind of stereotypes is gender stereotypes. These are very common in our day-to-day life. Power is the main reason for constructing gender stereotypes. Male dominated societies are the best examples of these kinds of stereotypes. Gender stereotypes, such as women are more emotional and weak and men are more powerful and less emotional, are common in our day-to-day life. Even in the folk tales or songs of various regions/

societies/countries men are depicted as brave, handsome, courageous and all powerful. On the other side, females are depicted as soft, sexy, charming, cute, loving, defensive and weak. In most of the rural areas, it is considered that women are not strong, they can only do domestic chores but men are considered strong and they can do all the work.

Jane Eyre (1847) by Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855) gives the best example of male dominated society where Jane Eyre is not allowed to get good education. Women were mostly educated in a way that they could only become either a nun or a governess.

The fifth kind of stereotypes is caste stereotypes. As the name suggests, these are based on a caste in a particular society. People of lower caste are considered to be unholy and thus considered to be untouchable. On the other hand, people of upper class are considered to be holy and thus, perform all the rituals and customs. But this division is not based on any logic. This was not the case initially. Castes are formed on the basis of their deeds (Karma) rather than origin (Janma) of an individual. But later on caste system became more rigid and thus it became impossible to move from one caste to another. Later on it was completely based on the Brahminical way of thinking about the society. Even in the current period, Brahmins do not allow people of lower caste to enter in their houses, which is again a direct symbol of caste based stereotypes which originates from caste based hegemony.

The sixth kind of stereotypes is stereotypes about individuals. Skaters, Goths, gangsters, etc. are a few examples of stereotypes of grouping individuals. Most of this stereotyping takes place in schools. It is considered that Goths wear black clothes and black make up, they are depressed and hated by society. It is also said that politicians think only of personal gain and benefits, all teenagers are rebels and the elder people behave like children.

The seventh and last kind of stereotypes is sexual stereotypes. It suggests that any feminine man is gay and any masculine woman is lesbian. Those who believe in gay stereotypes may also believe that homosexuality is immoral and wrong.

Stereotypes have overshadowed every aspects of life. In literature and art too stereotypes are present. In Shakespearean tragedies, women are not given much importance because they were not considered to be brave, courageous, heroic and wise but, on the other hand, they are the centre of Shakespearean comedies. Their depiction as comedians again highlights the stereotype that women are emotional, weak and comic. But they are also depicted as intelligent and tolerant in Shakespeare's plays. In *The Merchant of Venice,* Portia is very intelligent. She saves her husband's friend (Antonio) from getting murder with the use of her wit.

This is the case with not just Shakespeare's plays, but also other literature. In Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982), Shug Avery is criticized by the church's father because, first, she is a black woman and secondly she is sexually open and economically independent. The novel depicts racial as well as gender stereotypes which are prevalent in society about blacks and women.

In Mahesh Dattani's *Dance Like a Man* (1989), Amritlal is not happy with his son Jairaj who was pursuing his interest in dance and making it his profession. But Amritlal does not stop his daughter-in-law from dancing. He does so because he finds out that his son will have to dress up as a female which may cause shame for him and his family among his friends, relatives and others. Hence, he stops Jairaj from dancing and taking it as a profession.

Stereotypes are, thus, used to give immediate opinion or reaction about a society, individual or even culture. They may be correct or incorrect. Stereotyping may be correct if it is

based on the behaviour or activities of a society or individual. But if it is only based on appearances, it can be incorrect and demoralizing. A person cannot be judged on the basis of his/her looks. A person's character can be judged only on the basis of his activities and bahaviour in the society. Stereotypes are formed to give an immediate reaction about any situation, individual or society. If the appearance of an individual, depending on gender or race, is the basis of determining character, then Indira Gandhi would never have become India's Prime Minister and Barack Obama would never have become the president of the USA.

'Deconstruction' is a theory in literature which is originated by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). It is a way of criticizing not only both literary and philosophical texts but also political institutions. The word 'deconstruction' is an old French word. "It is a very old word in French language." (Derrida,1996,224)

It is also an English word which is derived from French 'deconstruction'. This word first used in English in 1882. Deconstruction can be called beginning of a reform. So deconstruction comes before reform.

> Deconstruction is not synonymous with 'destruction'. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis', which etymologically means 'to undo'… The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the carefull teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text. (Johnson 5)

In his 1966 lecture *Structure, Sign and Play: A Discourse in Human Sciences*, Derrida gives us the notion of 'decentering'. A text is made up of a system of language and it does not

have any centre. "—there is no 'God' of language that determines what every word mean." (Klages 62) It is indeed a starting point of post-structuralism.

> In the resulting universe there is no absolute or fixed point, so that the universe we live in is 'decentred' or inherently relativistic. Instead of movement or deviation from a known centre, all we have is 'free play'. Derrida embraces this decentred free play as liberating, just as Barthes in *The Death of the Author* celebrates the demise of the author as ushering in an era of joyous freedom. (Barry, 67)

Derrida seems to have taken the term from Martin Heidegger's use of 'destruktion' in *Being and Time*. Deconstruction is one term among many used by Derrida in his writing. Other terms are as 'hymen', 'ecriture', 'difference', 'text', 'trace', etc. "Derrida had initially proposed [the word *deconstruction*] in a chain with other words- for example, difference, spacing, trace- none of these can command a function as a master word". (Kamuf 1991)

But we can get a general sense of what Derrida means with deconstruction by recalling Descartes' *First Meditation*. Descartes says that for a long time he has been making mistakes in criticism. His criticism of former beliefs aims towards uncovering a "firm and permanent foundation". For making firm and permanent foundation, he wants to deconstruct the old building (beliefs). We have also seen how much Derrida is indebted to traditional transcendental philosophy which really starts here with Descartes' search for a "firm and permanent foundation". But with Derrida, we came to know that the foundation of beliefs is not a unified self but a divisible limit.

Derrida has given us many definitions of deconstruction. But, in my view, some of them are classical. The first is early, being found in 1971 interview "Positions" and in 1972 *Preface to Dissemination*. According to this definition, deconstruction consists in "two phases". (Positions, 41, Dissemination 4-6) At this stage of his career Derrida famously speaks of "Platonism" as Nietzsche did. Deconstruction is a criticism of Platonism. Platonism used the term binary oppositions. It is defined by the belief that existence is structured in term of oppositions and the oppositions are hierarchical. The one side of the opposition being more valuable than the other. Deconstruction attacks this belief by reversing the platonic hierarchies: the hierarchies between the invisible and intelligible; the visible and sensible; between essence and appearance; between the soul and the body; between voice and writing; between finally good and evil. Deconstruction analyses the binary oppositions to reveal their hierarchical nature. In order to clarify deconstruction's "two phases", let us restrict ourselves to one specific opposition, the opposition between appearance and essence. In Platonism, essence is more valuable than appearance. In deconstruction however, we reverse it, making appearance more valuable than essence. Here we can take the argument of Hume that show that all knowledge of what we call essence depends on the experience of what appears. So we can say that essence is mixed into appearance. Essence is found in to appearance.

The definition of deconstruction as two phases gives way to the refinement which we find in the *Force of Law*. Derrida used the term "aporia" in *Deconstruction and Possibility of Justice*. "The term "aporia" is one of the most famous terms in deconstructive criticism. "It literally means an "impasse", and it refers that there is a kind of knot in the text which cannot be unravelled or solved because what is said is self-contradictory." (Barry 78) Derrida calls the first "aporia", "the epoche of the rule" (Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, 22-23). Our

most famous axiom in political and ethical thought is that to be just or unjust and to exercise justice, one must be free or responsible for one's actions and decisions. Now question arises what is freedom. On the one hand freedom consists in following the rule, but in the case of justice, we would say that a judgment that simply followed the law was only right, not just. For a decision to be just, a judge not only must follow a rule but also he or she must re-institute it, in a new judgment. The law must be conserved and also destroyed or suspended, suspension being the meaning of the word "epoche". The law must be deconstructed. If a judge always follows a code, he or she is a calculating machine. According to Derrida the law is always found in violence. Derrida calls the second "aporia", "the ghost of the undecidable" (Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, 24-26). A decision begins with the initiative to read, to interpret and even to calculate. But to make such a decision, one must first of all experience what Derrida calls "undicidability". Because the decision about it seems to be impossible. The undecidable, for Derrida, is not mere oscillation between two significations. A decision had go through the ordeal. "A decision that do not go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process." (Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, 24). A decision could not be called presently and fully just. Justice always comes in the future. Therefore, deconstruction is a kind of thinking that never find itself at the end. Justice is impossible and therefore it is necessary to make justice possible in countless ways.

Poststructuralist argues that we live in a world where there is no possibility of certainity in belief or identity; there is no fixed or stable point of reference. We live in a decentred world, in which we can not know where we are, since all

positions seen relative to the centre have been called in to question with the decentering of the centre itself. (Nayar, 46)

The term "deconstruction" like "postmodernism" has taken many meanings. However in philosophy, it signifies certain strategies for reading and writing text. The term introduced in literature with the publication of three texts by Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology* (1974), *Writing and Difference* (1978) and *Speech and Phenomena* (1973). Of the three books, *Of Grammatology* widely describes the background of deconstruction as a way of reading modern theories of language. "…..deconstruction is always "context". But if context is history and a fortiori political, it has other valences in Derrida as well." (Derrida, 2013, 18). Derrida calls joining and separating of signs *difference*, a device that can only be read and not heard when *difference* and *difference* are pronounced in French. The "a" is a written mark that differentiates independently of voice. However, as Derrida Remarks: "There cannot be a science of difference itself in its operation, as it is impossible to have a science of the origin of presence itself, that is to say a certain non-origin." (Derrida, 1974, 12) Instead, there is only the trace of difference, that is, deconstruction. "There is nothing outside-text" (Of Grammatology, 163) means that "one never accedes to a text without some relation to its contextual opening. Reality itself is textual for deconstruction. What is written in text is real. What Derrida says "there is nothing outside text." Suggests that history, identity and reality of everything lies in a text or textualization of a text. Because language is not fixed and stable. Meaning of a word lies in the difference or opposition. Every meaning has its relevance with opposition. Because every sign has its own referential or contextual meaning. Sassure defines language as an independent system. " A context is not only text." (Derrida, 2013, 21)

Reading and interpretation, then, are not just reproducing what the writer thought and expressed in the text. This inadequate notion of interpretation Derrida calls a 'doubling commentary', since it tries to reconstruct a pre-existing, non-textual reality to lay alongside the text. Instead, critical reading must produce the text. Hence, the reading has to be deconstructive rather than reconstructive in this sense. (Barry 69)

Derrida introduced the concept of "Logocentrism" in which both speech and writing are included and he also introduced the concept of "graphocentrism" which makes writing superior than speech. A critic S. Ravindran says, "It is a reversal of the traditional concept of the superiority of speech or spoken words over the writing or the written words. There are critics who observe that Derrida is affecting a shift from logocentrism to graphocentrism". (Rajimwale 45) Derrida gives the concept of "difference", "trace" and "archwriting". He tells that "difference" is made up of "differing" and "deferring". The "differing" means that one is not being the other, while "deferring" is something delayed or postponed. In a written text each and every sign performs these two functions. "Derrida's monumental discovery is that no sign is fully adequate. It is written "under erasure" which expresses "the inadequacy of the sign"." (Rajimwale 45)

Deconstruction is to take an idea, an institution or a set of values, and to understand its mechanism by removing the cement that constitutes it. Deconstruction aims of liberating language from the traditional western concept of text along with the ways of dealing with it. (Rajimwale 46)

Another famous theorist Roland Barthes lays emphasis on text or written words. In his famous essay *The Death of the Author,* Roland Barthes gave us a new way of separating the language from the author "who until then has supposed to its owner" (Barthes, 147). In *S/Z* Barthes argues that a literary text does not have fixed or stable structure. He uses the word "readerly" text and "writerly" text. "Readerly" text is a text which has everything in itself and reader can understand only which is written by the writer. In this type of texts a reader has to know the background of the writer. But in "writerly" text meaning is produced by the reader according to his own sense. After writing a text, the writer hides himself. Text is present before the reader and he/she can generate any meaning from that written words according to the context in which that text is read. Writer does not play any role. Barthes also speaks about "open" and "closed" text. Open texts are the texts which have plurality of meanings, there are no beginning and end and no originality.

Once author is removed, there comes a change in the text, because the author is not a present of a text, the text is present. "The text is multi-dimensional and multi-vocal. A text is a tissue of quotations that come from countless centers of culture; at once sublime and comic." (Rajimwale 130) Every author is influenced by his own background and the text is limited by him. But by removing the author, we give text individuality and a freedom.

In *Tradition and Individual Talent* , T.S. Eliot requests for an extinction of the empirical author, the author god. Eliot says, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotions but an escape from emotions; it is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality." According to Barthes text is a space for the play of several voices and the reader is a space where these multiple voices gain their force. The text which is present before the author is space "in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, 149). The text should not

be viewed in a traditional sense. It should not be viewed as offering meanings- the message of Author God. On the contrary, it is a space where multiple voices can be heard. Barthes says, "…the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all traces by which the single text is constituted."(Barthes 150)

> The text is an empty space filled with quotations. The author is either good or bad at constructing texts on the basis of several codes at his disposal. Barthes denies any responsibility beyond this. He will not allow the author to express feeling and insight in what he writes; such things are generated by the codes with which he works not by him. (Das 164)

The author must die because "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author". (Barthes 155)

> It is not that the author cannot come back in to the text, however he can only do so as a guest, so to speak. If the author is a novelist, he inscribes himself in the text as one of the characters, as another figure sewn into the rug, his significance is no longer privileged and paternal, the locus of genuine but rather Indic. (Das 164)

The play which I have chosen for study is Poile Sengupta's *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni.*

Poile Sengupta was born in 1948 in Ernakulam, Kerala as Ambika Gopalakrishnan. She began writing during her school days in Delhi. She is one of the foremost Indian writers in

English especially well known as a playwright and writer for children. Her formal first name is Ambika but she writes and is known as Poile.

She has been a college lecturer, a senior school teacher and an educational consultant, a communication and language skill consultant, a consultant editor for a market research film and a teacher for Montessori school children. Her works includes fiction, poetry and drama for adult, as well as for children. Her collection of six plays, *Women Centre Stage:The Dramatist and Play,* was published by Routledge in 2010. The plays included in this book are as *Mangalam, Inner Laws, Keats Was A Tuber, Alipha* and *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni.*

A number of her books children have been published, including *The Exquisite Balance* (1985), *The Way to my Friend's House* (1988),*The Story of the Road* (1993), *How the Path Grew* (1997)- all published by Children's Book Trust, New Delhi. Frank Brothers, New Delhi published in 1993 *The Clever Carpenter and Other Stories , The Naughty Dog* and *Other Stories and The Black Snake and Other Stories. Waterflowers* was published by Scholastic Publications in 2000. Puffin Publishers published her two books: *Vikram and Vetal* (2006), *Vikramaditya's Throne* (2007) and a one act play *Good Heavens! Vikram and Vetal* has been translated into French.

Her stories for children have been included in a number of anthologies like *The Puffin Treasury of Modern Indian Stories*, *The Puffin Book of Funny Stories*, *Favourite Stories for Boys*, *Favourite Stories for Girls*, *A Clear Blue Sky, Bad Moon Rising*, *Sorry, Best Friend*, *24 Short Stories and One World.* She has written a number of columns for children, the longest running of which is *A Letter to You* , a humourous column about a ten-years-old boy Perky and

his friend Raghu, it ran weekly over thirty years. Another column of Sengupta, *Role call*, about school life appeared weekly in Deccan Herald.

She was a playwright. Her first full length play, *Manglam*, won the award for the most socially relevant theme in The Hindu-Madras Players Playscripts Competition in 1993. It was first performed on 14 January 1993 at Guru Nanak Bhavan, Banglore. This play deals with domestic violence and sexual abuse. The act 1 is divided into three scenes. This act is a play within a play. In this play, Manglam was a victim of rape and Sumati was a victim of molestation. The play shows the violence against women. The two modern educated families in the play as the play within the play are touched by abuse. Same characters are used in the both plays. This idea is used to show how from 1960 to present modern cosmopolitan family nothing seem to have changed.

Her play *Inga* was published in October 2014. This play deals with the story of Rapa, who is born into a Tamil Brahmin family. She is raised in Delhi, where she learnt English literature, which she finds fascinating. The basis of the book lies in the relationship of Rapa and her cousin, Inga. With Inga, Rapa spends her time during her summer holidays in Kerala. Poile brings to life the nuances of the character's everyday life in this postmodern world. About this novel, Poile's friend Shashi Deshpande says, "It is also a family story. Readers please don't expect a milk and honey story. It is strong, thick coffee." (Datta, The Mystery in the Family)

She wrote a series of plays as *Inner Laws* (1994), *A Pretty Business* (1995), *Keats was a Tuber* (1996), *Collages* (1998), *Alipha* (2001), *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001) and *Yavamajakka* (2000). In 2008, *Samara's Song* was shortlisted for the Hindu Metro Plus Playwright Award. She received in 1999-2001, a senior fellowship of the Government of

India to write plays for children in English. Poile has been an accomplished actor on stage and in films, *'The Outhouse'* which was directed by Leslie Carvalho and 'Shaitaan' which was directed by Bijoy Nambiar). She is the founder of theatre club, a Banglore based amateur theatre group. She has been a member of the society, that is the governing Council, of the NSD, New Delhi. She has also thrice been on the jury of Trinity College, London, in international competition of plays for young people. *Alipha* and *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* were two companion pieces which opened the theatre festival in Banglore in 2001. Her plays have been performed in Banglore, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata and other Indian cities and also in South Africa.

The thesis is divided into introduction, three chapters and conclusion. The "Introduction" deals with the concept of stereotypes and theory of deconstruction on which my thesis depends. In this thesis, I deconstruct two individual stereotypes of Shoorpanakha and Shakuni. The first chapter is "Assessing the Image of Shoorpanakha in the *Ramayana"*. In this chapter, I study the character of Shoorpanakha in the *Ramayana* by Valmiki. Then I compare her with the Shoorpanakha in other versions of the *Ramayana.* The hero of the *Ramayana* is Rama. And everything is shown from the point of view of Rama by taking him in centre. But there are some other versions which write that Shoorpanakha was beautiful and she was victim of circumstances and her own excess sexual desire. The second chapter is "Assessing the Image of Shakuni in the *Mahabharat*a". In this chapter, I study the character of Shakuni in the *Mahabharta* by Vedvyas. Like Ramayana, in *Mahabharta,* Shakuni is also shown as an evil minded and a stereotype of backstabbers. But in other versions ,it is found that Bhishma has done wrong to him and his family. So he wanted to take revenge. The third chapter is "Image of Shoorpanakha and Shakuni in Poile Sengupta's *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*. This is a postmodern work. In this text, Sengupta has shown these two characters on a same stage. And in this world, they want

to take revenge of the injustice done to them. So through this text, I will study how parody writing can break stereotypes. And at the last I conclude my thesis. The research methodology which is traced in the 7th edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* has been followed.

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Chapter I

Assessing the Image of Shoorpanakha in the *Ramayana*

In this chapter I study the character of Shoorpanakha in different versions of the *Ramayana*. In the great Indian epics, the *Ramayana*, she is presented as an evil character and main cause of destruction. From then she is taken as stereotype. There are various versions of the *Ramayana.* So the characters should be studied not only from the point of view of Rama as Valmiki did, but all other versions should be studied.

Shoorpanakha is the main character of Valmiki's epic, the *Ramayana*. She was the youngest daughter of Vishrava and kaikesi and sister of the antagonist of the *Ramayana*, Ravana, the king of Lanka. In Sanskrit, the word 'Shoorpanakha' literally means 'sharp, long nails'. Valmiki himself claims that if there had been no Shoorpanakha, then there would have been no Ramayana. She was ugly, ill-formed and repulsive looking.

> I am Shoorpanakha. My name is synonymous with Sin for many, encased for eternity in the pages of the epic Ramayana. I am not the role model parents would point their daughters towards. Why is that? You may ask. Because I admitted to lust. My name is pitted against Sita, the embodiment of purity and womanly virtues. She was everything I was not.(Drishna Kalita,The Untold Tale of Soorpanakha)

She could work many miracles by the magical powers and was wicked and mean. Valmiki describes Shoorpanakha,

सुमुखम् दुर्मुखी रामम् वृत्त मध्यम् महोदरी || ३- १७ –९

विशालाक्षम् विरूपाक्षी सुकेशम् ताम्र मूर्धजा |

प्रियरूपम् विरूपा सा सुस्वरम् भैरव स्वना || ३- १७- १०

तरुणम् दारुणा वृद्धा दक्षिणम् वाम भाषिणी |

न्याय वृत्तम् सुदुर्वृत्ता प्रियम् अप्रिय दर्शना || ३ –१७ –११

शरीरज समाविष्टा राक्षसी रामम् अब्रवीत् | (JesseR, 7 Untold Facts about Surpanakha from Ramayana)

She that demoness who is facially unpleasant one with that pleasant-faced one, pot-bellied one with the slim-waisted one, wry-eyed one with the broad-eyed one, coppery-haired one with the neatly dressed one, ugly featured one with the charming featured one, brassy voiced one with the gentle-voiced one, deplorably oldish one with the youngish one, crooked talker with the pleasant talker, ill-mannered one with the well-mannered one, uncouth one with couth, abominable one with amiable Rama spoke, besieged by Love-god. (JesseR, 7 Untold Facts about Surpanakha from Ramayana)

In Indonesia she is known as 'Sarapanaka'. She is delineated as ugly, pot bellied cross-eyed, brown hair, a grating voice that is unbearable and oversized breast that means a heart full of wickedness. When she grew up, she secretely married to a rakashasa, Dushtabudhi (in some texts his name is Vidyutjihva), prince of Kalkeya clan. Ravana was not happy with her sister's marriage and wanted to punish. But Mandodri, his wife, requested him to respect the decision of her sister. So Ravana accepted Shoorpanakha and her husband. Ravana wanted to conquer the

world. But   unfortunately, when he set out to conquer the world, Vidyutjihva was killed by Ravana . Thus she became a widow.

Her brother was the cause of her sorrows and sufferings. She cried bitterly, she came at Ravana's door, cursed him and said that there could be any brother who would be responsible for making his sister widow. Ravana repented and he said that he could not bring his brother-in-law back but to compensate for her loss, he gave her rule over Dandaka forest. She might go with her maternal cousin Khara and will be protected by fourteen thousand rakshasas. Khara would do as she wished.

So Shoorpanakha roamed freely in Dandaka forest with rakshasa and started to disturb the sages in their meditation. Soon Dandka forest became a fearful place because of their sway over it. Because they started to eat up the sages. In the forest, everywhere bones and skeletons were scattered.

Some years later, during their exile Rama, Lakshmana and sita came to Dandaka forest to stay. A sage told them about the rakshasa. One day they were returning from the river Godavari after taking bath. Rama was extremely beautiful. Shoorpanakha saw them in the forest. She was attracted towards Rama. So she wanted to make him her husband. According to Valmiki, she had transformed herself into a beautiful woman. She lost her usual terrifying shape. She approached Rama and proposed him. But Rama has taken vow of one wife. He was faithful to his wife Sita. He said, "I am already married and have my wife here. Perhaps you should ask Lakshmana to be your mate." So he said that his brother Lakshmana was living without a wife now. He suggested her to approach Lakshmana. Lakshman said,

Don't be foolish. He is trying to cheat you. What is your status and what is mine? I am here a slave to my brother, while you are a princess. How could you become my wife and accept the position of a slave's slave? Insist on Rama taking you as his second wife. Don't mind Sita. Soon Rama will prefer you to her and you will be happy with him. (Rajagopalachari197)

They decided to play a prank on her. At last, Shoorpanakha realized they were making her a laughing stock. She couldn't tolerate it. Hence, she tried to attack Sita because she thought Sita was the reason why Rama didn't become her husband. That was her bad luck and error. Lakshman, who saw her sister- in- law as the mother, became angry. He chopped her ears and nose. "Lakshamana at once took his sword and maimed Soorpanakha and drove her out. Disgraced and mutilated Soorpanakha uttered a loud wail and disappeared into the forest". (Rajagopalachari 198) Shoorrpanakha got embarrassed and wounded.

OH MY GOODNESS! My ear was cut off by Lakshmana today for attacking his sister-in-law Sita. The reason was because I saw the most gorgeous man I have ever seen in my life while I walking in the forest, and his name was Rama. Oh how I want to marry this man! But I went into some obstacles that I just could not overcome. It was terrible. First, I approached Rama and told him how I would make a good wife. He told me that he was already married and he would never have more than one wife. Then he told me to ask Lakshman whether I could be his wife, and he rejected me as well. They started laughing at me, and I was so embarrassed so I decided to make matter in my own hands. At this point, I had

reached an ultimate low, so attacked Sita, who I must admit is so beautiful it is ridiculous. (THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY)

Insulted Shoorpanakha first went to her brother khara and Dooshan. Kamban writes that she ran in to the forest rapidly, bleedingly and loudly appealing to her kinsfolk,"Oh, brother Khara! Oh brother Raavana! Oh Indrajit! Oh kings of the *Raakshasa* race! Are you all asleep? A mere man has insulted me and cut off my nose. Do you not hear my lamentation?" (Rajagopalachari 204) Khara along with Trishala and fourteen thousand rakshasas attacked Rama. But Rama killed all of them with his arrows. Now wounded Shoorpanakha went to his brother Ravana. She knew that woman is the weakness o Ravana. So she described the beauty of Sita. He became obsessed with Sita. He wanted to take her in his palace. He sought the help of Mareech to take Sita away to avenge his sister's insult. Then he kidnapped Sita. Now battle of this epic started. Shoorpanakha caused this massive destruction and end of her race.

Here Valmiki ended the story of Shoorpanakha. After this, he didn't tell about this character. What happened with her in the end? Where did she go? Did she get married again or not? Valmiki did not give answer of these questions. Maya Angelou Says, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you" (Angelou,I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing). In his epic the *Ramayana,*he introduced Shoorpanakha in the mid of epic. He told us about her physical appearance. And the error what she had committed. She was presented against Sita. Sita was beautiful and virtuous while she was ugly and obsessed with her sexual desire. She was presented as a free woman who wanders alone in the forest. She told Rama that "…that I am a free person—free to do what I like and please myself. Everybody in this forest is, as a matter of fact, afraid of me" (Rajagopalachari 196). She blamed her freedom for her disgrace. " My

freedom was my sin, as was my open sexuality. I dared to invite a man, the exiled king of Ayodhya , to make love to me".(Drishana Kalitha, The Untold Tale of Soorpanakha)

The character of Shoorpanakha is described differently by various writers. Some Hindu texts say that she was very beautiful as her mother. Parents gave her the name Meenakshi at birth which means one who has the beautiful eyes of fish. This shows that she was pretty. We can say that she was most misunderstood character in the *Ramayana*. "Don't believe those terrible sketches of me with sharp fangs. I was a peerless beauty with large fish shaped eyes, for which my mother had named me "Minakshi" at birth."(Drishana Kalitha, The Untold Tale of Soorpanakha)

Kamban , a Tamil poet gives a different description of Shoorpanakha from Valmiki. The Tamil poet thought that there is something wrong and wanting in Valmiki's story. So he has woven a new episode in which he describes her most charming personality. He delineates her as beautiful women with long beautiful, fish-shaped eyes, a perfect figure and charming personality. Kamban writes,

> …appeared before him like a full moon. Her slender frame was like a golden creeper climbing up the *Kalpaka* tree in Heaven. Her lovely lips and teeth matched her fawn- like eyes.
>
> Her gait was that of a peacock. Her anklets made music as she came near. Raama looked up and his eyes beheld this creature of ravishing beauty. (Rajagopalachari 202)

Kamban then writes that when Rama asks her who she is, then she replies that " I am the daughter of the grandson of Brahma. Kubera is a brother of mine. Another is Raavana, conqueror of Kailaasa. I am a maiden and my name is Kaamavali." (Rajagopalachari 202) When Rama asked about her purpose, then she replied, " It is not proper for a women to speak out trouble in her mind. And yet I suppose I must speak it out. The god of love has invaded my heart. You can and should save me." (Rajagopalachari 203) Many of us think her appearance was not good enough. Referring Kamban's Ramayana will surely change your mindset. She was beautiful and had magical power too.

This is Kamban's version of this episode. There are some variations here. Shoorpanakha is presented as a beautiful woman whereas Valimiki has presented her ugly. One more variation is that she did not directly propose Rama for marriage in Kamban's text. But one similarity is that both presented her as 'Kaamaroopini' or 'Kaamavali', that is, she was able to assume what form she liked.

In Indian movies also, her character is delineated as one of the most beautiful and charming characters of Indian Cinema. In Ketan Mehta's 3-D animated movie *Ramayana the Epic*, Shoorpanakha was looking similar to our own Bollywood star Priyanka Chopra. Director Chetan Desai says,

> In Hindu Mythology, Shurpanakha was known as the most beautiful woman of her age. We had to find someone as stunning as Shurpanakha. No Indian celebrity could be found to match to her face. It was then that I remembered Priyanka Chopra in *Aitraaz* and how she looked then. I referenced Shurpanakha's character from Priyanka's basic look in *Aitraaz*.

In the Rajasthani folk narratives of Ramayana, there are some stories about the rebirth of Shoorpanakha. "In the folk epic, Ravan is reborn as Jindhrav khiji, Surpanakha is reborn as the princess Phulvati while Laxman is reborn as Pabuji". (Rebirth of Surpanakha) In this folk narrative, she is named as Phulvati, as the name indicates she was very beautiful and delicate like a flower. Inspite of being demoness she was soft and delicate by heart. She said Khara to leave Rama alive. "He was so angry that he sent the Rakshasa warrior to kill the brothers, but I told him to make sure he keeps rama alive because I loved him." (THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE EVIL) But in our country or society, we consider her mere a stereotype of ugliness.

There are many interpretations and re-writings of epic the *Ramayana*. There are many facts about Shoorpanakha which are not known to us. So these books suggest that Shoorpanakha is the most misunderstood character in the *Ramayana*. When she went to Rama and expressed her desire, then her intention was no to get a husband. She didn't want to hurt Sita. And some poets and critics rightly said that her intention was not to get Rama and Lakshman as her husband. She proposed them and expressed her desire because her brother, Ravana, killed her husband Dushtabudhi. Her brother was the cause of her sorrow. Shoorpanakha loved her husband more than everything so she wanted to take avenge of his death.

> I have been thinking about my husband all day. He was such a great man, and he treated me like a princess. I know that he was getting a little money-hungry, but that was no reason for my brother to kill him. He was the only man I have loved except for Rama of course. I must have him, or I am going to go crazy. (THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE EVIL)

So she waited for an apt occasion to end the monarch, Ravana. Ravana was a very powerful and intelligent king because Lord Brahma has given him the boon. So she herself could not harm her. She knew it well so waited for many years for an occasion. When she came to know about Rama, it was known to her that no one could defeat her. She instigated Rama to become prey of her plan. Hence Shoorpanakha brilliantly made a reason to begin a fight between Rama and Ravana. Everything went as she thought.

> Today was a very sad day! Rama killed General Khara and Ravan's army, and I watched the whole thing. If Rama can kill an army he could definitely kill Ravana as well. I must devise a plan to get my brother killed for having killed my husband because he is the reason why I am miserable and lonely. (THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE EVIL)

She knew it very well that woman was the weakness of her brother. So she described the beauty of Sita. Ravana took away Sita. So she was the main reason of that battle of Rama and Ravana and death of her brother.

In some texts, she questions about her appearance and fate. She was given worse fate . her husband was killed and now she was alone. "Why am I so ugly? Why was I borm with yellow skin, big ears, a pot belly, and terribly messy hair? Is that why nobody wants me? Will I ever find a husband again that will treat me like my first husband Dushtabuddhi."(the good)

Shoorpanakha is considered as a stereotype of succubus. Everybody sees her as a mere succubus. But I didn't read anywhere that she appeared in the dream of Rama and had sexual intercourse with him. Did you ever read that Shoorpanakha was very cruel and she killed many?

We didn't read anywhere it so how she can be called a succubus. Although she was born in a Rakshasa family, she had not much nature of demon. She was gentle by heart. She was a lady who could feel like human being. She was fond of Rama and attracted towards his beauty. It is natural for a man or woman to fall in love. So she proposed Rama. But he did injustice to her. He played a trick on her with his brother. He hurt her feelings because she was thirsty of love. She expressed her desire and I think expression of desire is not an offence.

What Lakshman did with Shoorpanakha was not right. It should not have been the reply of her expression of feelings. He cut her nose only because she proposed them and tried to attack Sita. It was pure injustice. How indecent the proposal might be, doing this to a woman was not at all right. And if we look on the written words of text or deconstructed texts, it is written that nose of Shoorpanakha was cut. There is a phrase of cutting of nose which means wrong spot on someone's character or disrespect and molestation. She may be raped by Lakshman. Valmiki has written everything from the point of view of Rama, the Lord. So he didn't describe this incident and named her cut of her nose. But it is quite clear from this line that she was ill-treated and mutilated by Lakshmana which is wrong. In reply of the proposal, this insult of a woman is not at all right. Now-a-days, we celebrate women day and argued for women rights. But if we look back on our ancient text and even on our two great epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, they themselves are a proof of molestation against woman.

Valmiki has presented Shoorpanakha an ugly woman. She was not much beautiful as young Sita. It is said that beautiful and submissive can lead a happy life. She was a middle aged women when she approached Rama and Lakshman with proposal. Being a member of Rakshasa family, she was not submissive also. This might be a reason that she suffered a lot.

Shoorpanakha met Sita after the war. In Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of The Ramayana*, there is a chapter in which Shoorpanakha sees Sita. Sita was abondoned by Rama because people of his kingdom doubted her chastity. Rama was a religious person. But he doubted her wife and said her to go through the ordeal. In our ancient texts also women had to give ordeals. Why does a woman always have to give ordeals? Why does a woman have to prove her innocence? After ordeal also, he abandoned Sita in the forest. Rama, inspite of Shoorpanakha, insulted his own wife. So since ancient time, woman was not given due respect. Devdutt Pattanaik writes that after war, Shoorpanakha saw Sita in the forest. "There were hatred and Revenge in her mind but she didn't hurt Sita. Instead she said that Rama and Lakshman dumped Sita as they did to her." (JesseR, 7 Untold Facts about Surpanakha from Ramayana) Then they became friends and enjoyed each other's company. Later on Shoorpanakha expressed her concern towards Sita, "I was sincerely filled with sadness for the girl. Later on, this same husband would force her to walk through fire to prove her 'purity' and she would commit suicide by jumping in to a pit. She did not know this then, neither did I." (Drishna, The Untold Tale of Soorpanakha)

There are most of the facts about Shoorpanakha are unknown. In Bhramavaivrata Purana, it was written that Shoorpanakha penance Bhrama to get Rama as her husband in her next birth. She meditated, then Bhrama was pleased by her and gave her the boon. In the next birth she takes birth as maiden who served Krishna (the Avtar of Rama) with devotion. In the next birth her name was Kubja who had three stoops on her backbone. Shri Krishna made those stoops to disappear and then she became more beautiful later she became wife of Lord Krishna. She was one among 16008 wives of Lord Krishna.

In Rajasthan's folk tales, there are some other stories of the rebirth of Shoorpanakha. According to these stories, Lakshman was responsible for killing Ravana and in a future life Lakshman was killed by ravana. In the next birth, Ravana was reborn as Jindhrav Khichi. Shoorpanakha was born as a beautiful princess so she was named Phulvati while Lakshman is reborn as Pabuji.

According to this folk epic, Pabuji was about to marry phulvati but Jindhrav Khichi stops him to marry. Pabuji gave Phulvati a parrot and said, "If it dies know that, I am dead too. (rebirth) After sometime, Pabuji (incarnation of Lakshman) was killed by Jindhrav Khichi (rebith of Ravana) " … the parrot in Phulvati's hand died. Surpankha incarnate realized Pabuji had died. She decided to become a Sati by jumping into fire. She was his wife even though he was never her husband." (Rebirth of Surpanakha)

In the end of this epic, Lakshman had to pay for killing Ravana and mutilating Shoorpanakha. The story of Pabuji restricted to a small community in a corner of India shows the impact of the great epics on the imagination of Indians. Ramayana belongs to the Great Tradition that overarches across the subcontinent. Pabuji's epic is restricted to the Little Tradition. It is through the latter that the simplest of men in the farthest corners of India learn the most complex of Indian thoughts such as rebirth and karma. In the end even Lakshman was killed by Ravana. No one is spared in the wheel of life. . In Jain tales also Lakshman kills Ravana. But in the end, Ravana could not kill Lakshman.

> …according to the Jain way of thinking, a pair of antagonists, Vasudeva and
> Prativasudeva -- a hero and an anti-hero, almost like self and other –are destined
> to fight in life after life. Laksmana and Ravana are the eight incarnations of this
> pair. They are born in age after age, meet each other in battle after many

vicissitudes, and in every encounter Vasudeva inevitably kills his counterpart, his prati. Ravana learns at the end that Laksmana is such a Vasudeva come to take his life. Still overcoming his despair after a last unsuccessful attempt at peace, he faces his destined enemy in battle with his more powerful magic weapons. When finallyhe hurls his discus(cakra), it does not work for him. Recognising Laksmana as a Vasudeva, it does not behead him but gives itself over to his head. Thus Laksmana slays Ravana with his own cherished weapon. (Ramanujan, 145)

This folk epic is parody of Ramayana. In this epic the new form of Shoorpanakha is shown to us. She was a princess. She was virtuous lady. She was also given a good name 'phulvati'. She was about to marry the man who mutilated her in previous birth but the person who was his brother in the previous birth murdered the man. So in this story Shoorpanakha is shown as a victim not a vice character. She was disgraced by Lakshman, so he had to pay for it

Krittivas Ojha, a Bengali poet of fifteenth century,described that Shurpanakha changed herself into a beautiful princedd to seduce Rama and Lakshman. "At first Rama thought that she could be a daughter of god but he understood that she was a rakshasi by her nature." (Surpanakha, wiki.)

In the end, she again remain lonely and started to roam in the forest. "Rama finally got Sita back by killing my brother Ravana. I guess I will just returned to the forest and be lonely and miserable. I guess it can't get any worse than what it already is." (THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE EVIL)

But true fact is that in the end, no one knows where she disappeared. Some authors of various versions of the *Ramayana* writes that she lived in Lanka with Vibheeshana, the new king after Ravana. But after some years, she and her half-sister Kumbini were found dead in a sea.

Either she instigated her brother to take avenge of her mutilation by Lakshman or she made a plan to take avenge of her husband's murder by Ravana, it is said that she seeded the main incident of the battle between Rama and Ravana. If Shoorpanakha has given a chance to speak about herself, she might have told her story in a different way.

There are three hundred versions of Ramayana and telling of them differs from one another. In South Asian folktale Ramayanas, we find the mention of Shoorpanakha's daughter who comes to Sita to take the revenge on Sita of her mother's molestation. And it is said that she was the reason of sita's banishment.

> The daughter of Surpanakha is waiting in the wings to take revenge on Sita, whom she views as finally responsible of her mother's disfigurement. She comes to Ayodhya, enters Sita's service as a maid, and induces her to draw a picture of Ravana. The drawing is rendered indelible (in some telling, it comes to life in her badroom) and forces itself on Rama's attention. In a jealous rage, he orders Sita killed. The compassionate Laksmana leaves her alive in the forest, though, and bring back the heart of a deer as witness to the execution. (Ramanujan, 149)

She is a stereotype of succubus and ugliness. But in various Parody writing of Ramayana, writers tried to break these stereotypes. She was neither ugly nor succubus. She was a tragic character whose fate conspires with lust to drag her in the presence of Rama. She was made villainous by unfolding partial truth related to her. Evil characters becomes evil because they are

the victim of circumstances. She has a spot of negativity because Valmiki, who was a creator of this tale, has shown her as a negative character. We feel that if Rama and Lakshman had not made fun of her and reasoned with her whole matter could have resolved well. Also, severing the nose of a woman for a proposal is quite non-chivalrous thing to be done by a warrior. Lakshman has also cheated her. He didn't refuse her proposal by telling her about her marriage. So they themselves are the reasons of this battle.

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Chapter II

Assessing the Image of Shakuni in the *Mahabharata*

Like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* is also a great Indian epic. It introduced one more battle, the battle of Mahabharata, in the history of india. In the epic Mahabharta, written by Vedvyasa, Shakuni is pivotal negative character. Shakuni was son of Subala, the king of Gandhara. At present Gandhara that is known as Kandhar, is in Afganistan. At the time of his birth Sakuni was named as Saubala which means son of Subala. Later he was known as Shakuni. In Sanskrit, Shakuni literally means a 'bird'. He was also known as Gandhararaja (king of Gandhara) because after the death of his father he became the king of Gandhra. In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, he was an evil character and a villain. Radheya said to Duryodhana, "Do not try to demean yourself by these crooked thoughts so typical of your uncle Shakuni." (Subramaniam 117) He was the main cause behind the battle of Krukshetra. He was the brother of Gandhari, wife of the blind king Dharitrashtra. So Shakuni was the maternal uncle of Duryodhana.

Shakuni was very intelligent as well as devious character. It is said that he was the mastermind behind the game of dice and the Great War caused by this game. He was a controversial character.

In contrast to his sister's nobility and transparency, he was skilled in every form deceit and manipulation. He exulted in exploiting his victims gullibility. Short-statured and dark-complexed, his eyes look around his areas of vulnerability in other human beings. He believed in scoring his points through strategy rather than

confrontation. Weapon of warfare, he thought, were of those who were incapable of using their brains in defeating their enemies. (Kumar 37)

But many other writers and scholars believe that he was not quite as insidious as he is considered to be. He was a devotee of Lord Shiva. He loved his sister Gandhari very much. In some stories, it is said that Gandhari was manglik. So to avoid the negative consequences of the marriage of a manglik with non- maglik, Firstly, she was married to a goat.

According to legend, Gandhari was manglik. In Hindu astrology, a manglik is a person whose horoscope contains Mars in a certain house, which is considered unfavourable and inauspicious, especially for marriages. It is believed that the marriage between a manglik and a non-manglik would give rise to disastrous effect, failure of marriage or even death of one parther. A manglik marrying another manglik, however, would cancel out the ill effect arising out of marriage. (Vishawanathan, Shakuni: A Villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

The marriage of a manglik with a tree, idol or a sacrificial animal is called 'kumbh-vivaah'.

There is yet another belief that the consequences of a single manglik marriage resolved by conducting a ceremony called 'kumbh-vivaah', this is, getting the manglik "married" to banana tree, a peepal (sacred fig) tree, a silver or gold idol of Lord Vishnu or, rarely, to a sacrificial animal. (Vishawanathan, Shakuni: A Villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

After sacrificing the goat with which she was married, she was again married with Dharitrashtra, the blind prince of Hastinapur. It is said that Dharitrashtra was non-manglik. The Gandhari's family members thought that the ill-omen was over then. In the another version of *Mahabharata,* it is written that Dhritrashtra knew about this incident much after his marriage. And he became very angry. Because then he was the second husband of Gandhari. Devdutt Pattnaik, in his book *Jaya: An Illustration on Mahabharata*, writes that Dharitrashtra wanted to punish Gandhari's family because he thought that they were liar because they did not tell him about her first marriage. So, he put them in prison and decided to starve them. He started to give a fistful of rice to them. But Gandhari's father started to give all the food to his youngest son, Shakuni. Because he thought that he was very intelligent and cunning and he would survive to avenge their death. In physical appearance, he is characterized as short man with twisted legs. It is said that his father twisted his legs to make him remembered to take revenge.

> As punishment, he decided to put Gandhari's family in prison, including king Subala. He decided to gradually starve them to death and so, each of them was given only one fistful of rice to eat every day. Knowing that they would not live long on this diet, Gandhari's father asked his youngest son, Shakuni, to consume all the food given to them, so that at least he would survive to avenge their death. In order to make sure that he would forever remember to take revenge, his father twisted his leg – that gave him the permanent limp that typically characterizes Shakuni. (Vishawanathan, Shakuni: A Villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

In other version of the Mahabharata, the reason of Shakuni's revenge was described differently. Although he wanted see the downfall of Hastinapur but the force of revenge was different from the above mentioned reason. According to the folklores, the military campaign of

Hastinapur attacked on Gandhara. In this battle, the king of Gandhara, Achala Suvala was killed. All male members of his family were imprisoned, saying that they were indulging in adharma. Shakuni and his one hundred brothers were also imprisoned. Shakuni was the youngest of them. Each of them was fed with one grain of rice each day. The family decided to give the grains of rice to Shakuni because he was the youngest and he was the most cunning. So they thought if he survives he would be able to take revenge of their death. There was injustice to them so the father of Shakuni, king Subala bent his knees in front of Dharitrashtra.

When Subala was at the stage of his demise, he requested to his son-in-law, Dharitrashtra to free Shakuni. Subala also said him to take care of Shakuni and promised that in return Shakuni would protect his sons. So Dharitrashtra took pity on his father-In-law and freed Shakuni. So Shakuni survived. It is sure that he wrecked vengenance on the Kuru dynasty by spreading the poison of heatred for Pandvas in the mind of Duryodhana and other Kauravas.

In some other versions of Mahabharata, it is written that his dice which he has used as an instrument to take revenge was made up of the thigh bones and backbones of his dead father's body. That dice had magical abilities as his father's soul resided within it. By using it he was being able to defeat Pandavas in the Game of Dice because his father helped him to win all games that he played.

It is believed that he used the thigh bones and backbone of his father's body to create the dice, using which he was able to defeat the Pandavas in the elaborate Game of Dice that followed in the years ahead. This set of dice, it is said, had magical abilities, as his father's soul resided within them. They would help him

win all games of dice he ever played during his lifetime. (Vishawanathan, Shakuni: A Villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

Shakuni's dice which covers many pages in Mahabharta, plays a vital role. According to above mentioned story, it was made up thigh and back bones of his dead father. But this story did not find any place in the Mahabharata. These sub-plots are later recreated differently by many writers. But the dice of Shakuni was really made up ivory. "In reality, Shakuni's dice was made up of ivory and reason why it is considered as magical because Shakuni was an illusionist, who created an illusion in front of the Pandavas, that he won and they lose." (Verma, 6 Lesser Known Facts About Shakuni of Mahabharata)

Shakuni took care of his nephews Kauravas as his father promised to Dharitrashtra. He lived with all of them and showed special care and affection towards Duryodhana. And after sometimes, he became their trusted confidante. He used their trust to sow hate and wicked thoughts about Pandvas in them. Because he knew it very well that Kauravas were jealous and would not stand a chance against their powerful and skilled cousin. So he instigated them to fight against Pandavas which was the downfall of them. Later his wish of revenge was fulfilled.

He was one of the most intriguing characters of the *Mahabhrata.* He is portrayed as a mastermind behind everything what happened later with Kauravas. In some stories, it is said that he wanted to take revenge of the misfortunes of his sister because of Bheeshma. So, his real enemy was Bheeshma not Pandavas because he brought the proposal and insisted on Gandhari's marriage to blind prince. He had no anger towards his nephews and Pandavas . He was angry with Bhishma and wanted to end the whole Kuru line in the same way the Kurus had his line

years before. So he incited hatred between Kauravas and Pandavas. The envy of the five Pandavas was fire burning in Duryodhana's life which gave Shakuni a chance to take revenge.

The force of revenge was so intense in him that he stayed at Hastinapur till his death. He did not take care of his two sons, his family and his own citizens.

> " However, the fact remains that he had two sons-Uluka and Vrikaasur. Ulook or Uluka wanted to take his father back to Gandhara before Pandavas came from Agyatvas but, Shakuni did not go back as he wanted to sit and initiate the Kurukshetra war." (Verma 2)

In the *Mahabharta* there is not any mention about the ill-treatment with Shakuni's family by Kurus. In the "Adi-Parva" of the *Mahabharata*, it is described that Bheeshma chose two girls Madri, daughter of king of Madra Desha and Gandhari, daughter of Subala, the King of Gandhara as wives for his nephews, Pandu and Dhritrashtra. He told Vidura about those princesses and the benefits of these marriages to their kingdom.

> These two princesses seem to be fit enough to be the queens of our young men. No other king is equal to us in status. Only these two kings are endowed with a good heritage. The daughters of these two kings can become the brides of the Kuru princes. (Subramaniam 27)

Bheeshma heard from the Brahmanas that Gandhari worshipped Lord Shiva and had obtained from the god the boon that she would have a century of sons. So Bheeshma sent messenger to the king of Gandhara. King Subala at first hesitated because the bridegroom was

blind, but after taking in to consideration the blood of Kurus, their fame and behaviour, he happily accepted the proposal.

> Bheeshma sent word to Gandhara king. He get demurred at first, the prince Dharitrshtra was blind. But Gandhari, the daughter of the king, assured him that she had no onjection to marry the Kuru prince. Her next action was a great deed of self denial. She was convinced that she should be better than his lord in anything. She therefore got a piece of silk and bound up her eyes, refusing to see the world which her husband could not see. The king, Subala, sent his daughter to Hastinapur with his son Shakuni. The marriage was celebrated in the capital city and Shakuni returned to Gandhara after the wedding of his sister. (Subramaniam 24)

The character of Shakuni is deconstructed in the folklores. And the stories in which he is shown as forced by revenge are folklores. In *Mahabharata*, Shakuni has not been given due concern. Without any reason he was created as an evil and negative character. No one is good or evil. The goodness and badness of a person has a reason behind it. Every evil person is a victim of circumstances. So Shakuni's revenge also has a reason which is described in other versions of Mahabharata and in folktales.

According to these versions, Shakuni was unhappy with his sister's marriage with a blind man. He was very angry with Bheeshma because he brought the proposal of marriage. Shakuni thought that marriage of his sister with a blind man is an insult and humiliation of his kingdom. He swore to avenge this misfortune and insult of his sister. So he started to destroy Bheeshma's clan slowly. He achieved his aim by poisoning the mind of his nephews.

Shakuni was not an evil character because he was very disturbed by his sister's condition. Whatever he has done is because of his love for his sister.She voluntarily blindfolded herself. It does not go down to well with Shakuni. He constantly advised her sister to take off her blindfold and she Bheeshma's destruction but she refused. So whatever he has done is the expression of his anger. Because he was very angry to see the injustice that Gandhari has to go through by leading her whole life with blindfold.

Shakuni's character is controversial. In The *Mahabharata* by Shiv K. Kmar, it is written that Shakuni did not live his whole life in Hastinapur. He came to Hastinapur to spend some time with his sister. But during that time, he mixed poison of hatred in the heart of Kauravas. He advised Duryodhana to mix poison in Bheema's food. Bheema was very powerful, so Duryodhana was jealous of him. He was also the mastermind in the plan of the wax palace. "In planning these plots, he was assisted by Shakuni, who had come to Hastinapur to spend some time with his sister, Gandhari. But ever since his arrival, he introduced into the palace an element of intrigue." (Kumar 37) He wanted that his nephews could get the throne. So he planned to kill Pandavas. "So if the Pandava brother could somehow be eliminated, Duryodhana could rule unchallenged." (Kumar 37) "So when Shakuni came up with an ingenious plan to wipe out the entire Pandava family—the five brothers and their mother Kunti—Duryodhana was deeply excited." (Kumar 37) The entire plot of death trap in the palace of lac was hatched by Shakuni and Duryodhana. Vidura says, "The plot was hatched by the king, his son and Shakuni." (Subramaniam 83)

Duryodhana was a good-natured person for his friends and people. But his jealousy of the five Pandavas was intense. This fire of jealousy in his heart gave Shakuni a Chance.

Duryadhana told Shakuni, "Unless or until I see the destruction of Pandavas I cannot be happy. I must get the better of them. Uncle, you say you love me. If you do really love me, then think out a plan which will make me master of the world." (Subramaniam 176) After thinking a while Shakuni devised a plan.

> I shall make all that immense wealth yours. Not a drop of b lood will be shed. Nor will any blame be attached to your name. Shed off this depression and listen to me… Yudhishthra had one terrible weakness. He loves gambling, but he does not know who to play. We will use this to serve our ends. I am extremely clever at throwing the dice. There no one in this world who can play against me and win. I will do what will please you, by using this skill of mine. You must invite him to a game of dice. I will make him gamble away his entire kingdom. You must tell your father and get his permission. It will then be like taking a toy from the hand of a child. I can do it for you easily. Get your father's consent. (Subramaniam 177)

Shakuni refused Duryodhana to get supremacy over Pandvas by spilling blood. "Spilling of blood is utterly futile when human ingenuity can yield much better results." (Kumar 86) Shakuni was waiting for a right time for taking revenge. Shakuni and Duroyadha were very happy with that plan. So he thought that that was the right time. He trapped Duryodhana in his words. "Well, it was written my horoscope that I would come into your life to steer you through every crisis…. You see, I am also a believer of sorts. My Narayana is the six in the game of dice and it has never forsaken me." (Kumar 85). Vidura who was a very wise man, knew that Shakuni's intention was not good. "He could immediately fathom Shakuni's real motivation.

From the day Shakuni arrived in Hastinapur, Vidura had hunch that he was up to no good."
(Kumar 87)

Shakuni was the mastermind of the game of dice or the game of Chance. It is mentioned that his dice was made up of the bones of his father. So he was undefeatable in that game because his father's soul resided in the dice. His father's soul helped him to win. This is not mentioned in the *Mahabharat*. It is said that this story of his father soul was made up later other writers. According to the *Mahabharata*, Shakuni's dice was made up of ivory. The event of the game of dice was most important in the *Mahabharta*. And the magic what the dice did also very important.

Shakuni incited Yudhishthra, who was not ready, to play the game. Shakuni said, "This is, after all, a game which I am suggesting. It is not as though all one's belongings are at stake! I said this game is as good as any other to while away the time."(Subramaniam 181-182) He sneered at him by saying that "Poor Yudhishthira had just acquired wealth after the great Rajsuya. He does not want to part with it. After all it is new to him. Let him keep it." (Subramaniam182) So Yudhishthira was become ready to play. When he lost his weath, kingdom and his four brothers then Shakuni said him to stake their wife, Draupadi. "You still carry a rare jewel in your hand—the milk bathed Draupadi whom Arjuna won at the svayamvara. It would be our last round and, who knows, destiny might swing in favour this time." (Kumar 90) But this time also Yudhishthira lost and Shakuni won. "Duryodhana came to Shakuni and embraced him lovingly…. Indeed, this the happiest day in my life. I owe it entirely to you, my dear uncle." (Subramaniam 185) According to a version, Shakuni was an illusionist and so he created an illusion during the game, making everyone who was present there that he won the

game. No soul resided in his dice. When Duroyodhana said that now Draupadi is our slave and he ordered his brother, Dussasna to take Draupadi to the assembly. Dussasana started to disrobe her. Everyone was silent and amazed. Then Vidura spoke, "O Duryodhana, you are provoking the gods, who will never forgive you for what you have said and done today. As for your uncle Shakuni, he will surely end up in *naraka*. That is where he belongs." (Kumar 91) Draupadi prayed to Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna gave her reams of cloth. So, she could not be disrobed. When Draupadi came to know that Lord Krishna had saved her then she thanked her. She cursed that Kuru line would be ended. She vowed that she would not tie her hair till Dussasana was killed and her hair was washed in his blood. Pandavas also vowed that they would kill the kauravas in order to avenge the disrespect and humiliation of Draupadi. The path of the battle of Mahabharata was clear after this incident. So, we found Shakuni was the mastermind of the game of dice.

Shakuni instigated Pandavas for battle by many more ways. When Pandavas were in the in Vanvaas, then Shakuni made a plan that Pandavas would be cursed if a sage will go to them. Because they had nothing to give anyone to eat. So he requested to sage Durvasa to visit Pandavas. But this time Draupadi saved them. She prayed to Lord Krishna and Krishna saved them.

Shakuni continued to hatch plans because his main motto was the revenge. He advised Duryodhana to become friend Shalaya, Pandu's Brother-in-law because he was more powerful.

> … he advised Duryodhana to befriend King Shalya, Pandu's brother-in-law (brother of Madri, who was the mother of Nakula and Sahadeva). Shalya had the unique gift of becoming much stronger while faced with aggression. A skilled

archer and strong mace fighter, he was a warrior who was looked up to with fear and respect by both allies and foes. Shakuni asked Duryodhana to trick Shalya by hosting a feast for him and his huge army. Shalya, who mistook Duryodhana for Yudhisthira, was impressed by his hospitality and offered his services to him during the war. When he realized he was tricked, he visited Yudhishthira and apologized to him, also promising that he would try his best to demoralize Karna's spirits (he was asked to become Karna's charioteer) during the course of war. (Vishawnathan, Shakuni: A villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

Shalaya killed many soldiers of Pandavas army. But on the eighteenth day of war, he was killed by Yudhishthira. His death was a great loss to Kauravas.

The Plan to kill Abhimanyu was also of Shakuni, the young and valiant son of Arjuna and Subhadra. He was the husband of Uttara, the princess of Matsya. He was only sixteen years old. Shakuni went to Duryodhana and said: "It is impossible to kill this young man. It is not possible to stop his progress. He has got to be killed. Let us kill him together." (Subramaniam 585) So they formed seven tired chakravyuha. No one could break this formation except Arjuna, Krishna and Pradyumna. They sent Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna away from and trapped Abhimanyu in the Chakravyuha. He fought fearlessly and brilliantly. Kauravas committed a sin becaused six worriers together attacked on him which was against the rule of battle. Shakuni stabbed him and he fell on the ground on the thirteenth day or war and died.

Shakuni and his Uluku were fighting brilliantly but on the eighteenth day of war, Nakula killed Uluku. He has taken an oath to kill Shakuni's son on the day of the game of dice. Shakuni

did not bear the death of his son. He fought for a while and then he tried to run away. Sahadeva stopped him and said:

> Why are you trying to run away? If it had not been for you, this war would never have happened. Only   if you had not entered Hastinapur, Duryodhana would never had lost his princely nature and become a cheat. You were so happy when you played a game of dice with my brother. I swore that I would kill you. You laughed at all of us when we took the oaths. But now under your eyes, all our oaths have been fulfilled…. It only needs your death to make us all true to our oaths. Come and fight with me. (Subramaniam 747)

According to some versions of the *Mahabharta*, Shahadev knew his aim so he said that now you have achieved what you wanted.

> Sahadeva faced Shakuni on the battlefield. Being the wisest of the Pandavas, Sahadeva knew exactly what the latter's motive was, and the actual reason why he waged war against the Pandavas – in order to seek revenge. Sahadeva told Shakuni that he should stop fighting, since he had already achieved what he wanted to. He asked him to go back to his kingdom, Gandhara, and rule, instead of participating in this meaningless violence and killing. (Vishawnathan, Shakuni: a villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

Now Shakuni told Shahadeva about his story of revenge and why he wanted to take revenge. He told him about the torture of his and his family by Dharitrashtra and Bheeshma. He admitted that he made plan to poison Bheema, the Lac House incident and to kill Abhimanyu.

At that moment, Shakuni felt deep remorse and a genuine repentance for all that had transpired in the recent past. He suddenly felt like opening out to this young man standing in front of him – to talk to him, like an elder does to a younger member in a family. He recounted to Sahadeva all his childhood events; how his whole family had been tortured at the hands of Dhritarashtra; and how his sister had suffered marrying a blind King. He admitted to having poisoned Bheema; planning the Lakshagraha incident; chalking out a strategy to kill Abhimanyu and so on. He also confessed to all the other crimes he had committed in this lifetime and told the young man that he could no more bear to live on; carrying this load of remorse and guilt for all the evil deeds he had done in this lifetime.(. (Vishawnathan, Shakuni: a villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

So Shakuni told Shahadeva:

… he could no more bear to live on; carrying this load of remorse and guilt for all the evil deeds he had done in this lifetime. Shakuni finally revealed his good side – something that no one ever imagined existed! He told Sahadeva that the only thing left for him to do would be to sacrifice his life on this very battlefield. He further stated that it would be an honour for him to shed his mortal coil in a battlefield as great as Kurukshetra; in a place where such great Maharathis (mighty warriors) had fought and been martyred. (Vishawnathan, Shakuni: A Villain or a Victim of Circumstances)

Now all hopes of Duryodhana were died with the death of Shakuni. On last day of battle, he was killed by Shahadeva. But at the time of his death, he was at peace, because his aim

of taking revenge on Kuru dynasty was fulfilled. In the *Mahabharata*, the death of Shakuni is marked the end of evil. It is said that after the death of Shakuni Ambhi Kumar became the king of Gandhara. And after sometime, Chandragupta Maurya attacked Gandhara and killed Ambhi Kumar.

Shakuni possessed many evil qualities but he had some good qualities also. Kuravar community of Kollam district of Kerala was influenced by his good qualities. So they dedicated an old shrine in Pavithreswaram to him. They placed a throne in the temple and it is said that that was the throne of Gandhara used by Shakuni. And it is believed that at the place of that temple Shakuni got *Moksha.* And they worship him as Lord Shakuni.

So Shakuni is a controversial character. Instead of the original text of the *Mahabharata*, there are many Parody writings which present him differently. He was considered as a stereotype of a backstabber and wicked person. He was the mastermind behind the battle of Kurukshetra. He devised many plan to incite hatred between Kauravas and Pandavas. But in reality, no one is good or evil. Circumstances and perspectives make man evil. Evilness of a person has a reason behind itself. Shakuni was also a victim of circumstances. His whole story was a story of revenge. He was a vastly misunderstood character. He was not a villain. Whatever he had was the reply of ill-treatment and torture by Kurus to him and his family. Revenge presents in the blood of a person.

There are also some good qualities of his character. He loved his sister very much. A person who had a loving heart and pity for someone cannot do wrong to anyone without any reason. He wanted to take revenge of the plight of his sister and in this process of taking revenge, he lost his own life.

To portray him as a wicked character, he was delineated as a short-statured with twisted legs. But in reality, he was not a villain. Circumstances created cunningness and feeling of revenge in him. He was a victim of circumstances and perspectives.

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Chapter III

Image of Shoorpanakha and Shakuni in Poile Sengupta's

Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni

Both Shoorpanakha and Shakuni are pivotal characters of two great Indian epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Both were victims. They are considered as stereotypes. Shoorpanakha is a stereotype of ugly and sucubbus woman whereas Shakuni is a stereotype of backstabbers and evil-minded person.

> For us they epitomized 'evil'. Shoorpanakha, and 'ugly' vamp and Shakuni, the shrewd, conspiring and manipulating uncle. However beneath their 'villainous' cloaks resided a brother, who felt betrayed, and a sister, whose love was answered by a violant thrash from two 'godly' brothers respectively, who hardly cared to know. (Ipshita Mitra, Shakuni and Shoorpanakha Meet to Retell History)

Poile Sengupta has deconstructed these two characters in her play *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001). She brought the two villains from the two great epics together on one stage in the postmodern world. In the disguise of mythical title, the two characters the MAN and the WOMAN present contemporary issues and like those mythical characters want to take revenge. They relate their own condition to the condition of those characters. This play is set in the postmodern time. But time to time, it travels back to two great Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* and present them in to present context and

relevance. "It is for the first time in Indian theatre that Shoorpanakha and Shakuni come together and stories from the two epics are merged." (Sengupta 242)

Even today these two characters are hated. They are considered as negative characters but in the present time, they meet in an airport's waiting lounge and want to take revenge. Sengupta had tried hard to understand the plight of these mythological characters. The play is in an airport. Because of the threat of terrorism the flight is postponed. A dialogue between two characters begins and after sometime descends into the unseen historical time and space. They are, in fact, victims and vengeance seekers and throughout the play the theme of revenge runs in both of them.

During their conversation, they try to justify that they were not evil characters. They blame for the misrepresentation of their characters in the epics and in other versions of the epics. Both characters played important roles in their epics but they are forgotten once their action is completed. After the incident of chopping of nose and ear and inciting the battle between Rama and Ravana, the writer did not mention her anywhere. He did not tell where Shoorpanakha had gone and what had happened to her.

There are only two characters in the play and they are named as the MAN and the WOMAN. They are not given any specific name and they dressed in contemporary travelling dresses because they are universal characters. They do not belong only to the present time they belong to the all times. They present the old mythical characters as well as the condition of present man and woman.

The WOMAN had a budging handbag and a glossy magazine while the MAN had a heavy briefcase picked up from among the props downstage. She was wearing the spectacles and reading the magazine. She was reading it from upside down. So it is clear that she does not know to read and write. But when she saw the man she hid her spectacles because she thought she was looking ugly when she wore spectacles. When Shoorpanakaha saw two young and beautiful princes in the forest she hid her ugliness and by the magical power turned into a beautiful princess.

When the MAN and the WOMAN started their conversation but they were frustrated. They started quarrelling at the petty things. The MAN was impatient. He started shouting at woman. But the Shakuni of the *Mahabharata* had the patience. He waited many years to take revenge and hatched many plots. Although he himself does not show any sign of patience, he told the WOMAN to have patience like Shakuni.

> MAN: That was always your problem, impatience. (Sengupta, 275)

> MAN: The worst of all vices. Look at Shakuni. How grandly he planned the whole thing. How patiently he waited. And he got the reward, didn't he? (Sengupta 275)

In the *Ramayana*, the nose, ear and breast of Shoorpanakha were chopped by Lakshamana. It means she was disrespected by him. If we consider these words 'nose and ear were cut', it means that she might be assaulted physically. She might be raped. The *Ramayana* is a holy text and for hiding the truth of rape, the author might have used this phrase. In this play,

the WOMAN uses this very word 'rape'. "But as somebody or the other said, if rape is enevitabe…" (Sengupta 248)

Like Shoorpanakha, the WOMAN also tells about her brother. She says, "And my own brother, who will do anything for me, is as… as strong and… and powerful as ten men…." (Sengupta 251) Thus for the first time, she reveals that she is a mouthpiece of Shoorpanakha.

In the *Ramayana*, Shoorpanakha did not know that Rama and Lakshmana were married. She proposed them without knowing the truth of their marriage. But there is one different between this character of this play and Shoorpanakha. The WOMAN said that she wanted a married man and wanted to have sex with him.

> Woman: I'm an enchantress.
>
> Man: I heard you…. And you enchant whom?
>
> Woman: Everybody. Every heterosexual man. Even… even married man.
>   Especially married man. (Sengupta 252)

Shoorpanakha was cheated by the two brothers. They did not refuse her. They played pranks on her. They instigated her to become rude. She proposed Rama but Rama sent her to his brother and said that he was alone there and could become a better mate for her. Then the WOMAN said, "Who the hell is bothered about the brothers?... Though I must say that as a substitute…" (Sengupta 254) If they do not cheat her the story of the *Ramayana* might have been different. The Woman:

You know what they did to me… the two brothers… they laughed. Laughed at me. They teased me. Mocked me. The older one said, ask my brother… he might want you… the younger one said… I can't marry without my brothers consent… ask him…. They tossed me this way and that, as if… as if I didn't deserve more respect. As if I was a… a broken plaything. (Sengupta 261)

Shoorpanakha expressed her sexual desire to Rama first and then to Lakshamana. They disrespected her. Lakshamana chopped her ear and nose. So she pondered what wrong she had done. " I was bleeding… all down my face.. my chest… bleeding…. Was it so wrong to tell a man 'I love you'?" (Sengupta 262). Expression of desire is not an assault. In this world, we celebrate woman day. We always talk about the rights of woman. But if we look back in our literary texts, they are itself full of the humiliation of woman, even our two great epics also. In the *Ramayana,* Shoorpanakha was mutilated and humiliated. In the end, Sita was also insulted. In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi was also disrespected by Kauravas. They tried to disrobe her.

In our society, if a woman does something wrong, she will be punished. She is not allowed to express her emotions. Emption or desire is a characteristic of a woman. And if she hurt, hurt is also her emotions. But in this patriarchal society, man can do anything what he likes. He is not questioned. The expression of desire of Shoorpanakha created that mess. Her fault was that she wanted love. She says, "I wanted love…. Just a little love…. For a little while" (Sengupta 262).

If we shift the centre of the text and study this text without taking Rama in centre, then we will find that Shoorpanakha was not wrong. Her husband was killed by her brother, Ravana. Now she was alone in that forest. Every man or woman has sexual needs. If these needs do not

fulfilled, they will create disaster. Shoorpnakha was also thirsty for sex. On seeing two beautiful men in the forest, her desire became more intense. So she did nothing wrong. She proposed them. But they did wrong, they dishonoured her. We expect that if Rama and Lakshamana had not played pranks on her and had not reasoned with her, whole matter could have been resolved very well without fight. Chopping the nose and ear of a man just for a proposal is quite non-chivalrous thing to be done by a warrior.

Both of these characters were angry and were seeking vengeance to undo the injustice. They wanted to prove their innocence.

> MAN: They were conspirators.
>
> WOMAN: Violators.
>
> MAN: They violated all human rights.
>
> WOMAN: They assaulted a defenceless woman.
>
> MAN: They waged a wrongful, a totally unjustified war. (Sengupta 278)

The MAN and the WOMAN feel that even in the present time, they are similarly neglected and humiliated and hence find a parallel to epic characters of Shakuni and Shoorpanakha. The MAN said that his land was snatched, his brother was taken away and his thirteen years old sister was insulted, raped and murdered.

> MAN: My home… my land is being torn apart. They took away my brother.
>
>   Said he was an Informer. (Sengupta, 279)
>
> MAN: Then my sister…. My thirteen-years-old sister… they… (Shouts.) You
>
>   think I have any… bleeding… love … left in me? (Sengupta 280)

So he thinks that his story is equal to Shakuni. The WOMAN thinks that love, hate and bomb, these three words are equal. They are four lettered words. So for taking the revenge of hate they wanted to use bomb. The MAN carries a bomb in his briefcase. They came down to the stage and dressed themselves like epic characters. Like Girish Karnad's *Naga Mandala*, *Hayavadna* and *Yayati* and Ravindranath Tagore's *Chitra*, mythology is perfectly blended with contemporary situations. The play uses two minor characters who move continuously between the past and the present.

In this play, Sengupta writes about the plight of a married woman in the contemporary world. Shoorpanakha got married to Dustabudhi who was killed by her brother Ravana. So she came back to live in Lanka. But at this point, the character of the WOMAN is different from Shoorpanakha. The Woman is still unmarried. She did not get married because she did not want to be a typical type of married woman. She categorized married women into two types. The first type of women is considered as pigeon. They work all the day with cooing. So they get headache when they go to bed.

> WOMAN: All over the world like pigeon. Cooing (coos.) like bloody
>
>   pigeons. Come home soon darling… I have cooked you your
>
>   favourite dinner. Do you know your son has come thirty-first in
>
>   class? Such an improvement. Just like his father.
>
> WOMAN: And they get headaches, these wives. They always get headaches
>
>   when they go to bed….
>
> MAN: Ah! Now I know why I didn't get married.
>
> WOMAN: Who would want to be a wife? To be a pigeon. Grey and stupid and
>
>   cooing… cooing all the time. (Sengupta 255)

Another type of women is like that of a crow. She always caws before her husband for realizing him his duties. She says:

> Oh yes, there are. Those are the crows. Caw! Caw! Why are you so late? What did you do with your salary? Caw…. Why haven't you pay the school fees? Caw…. Caw. Who is that bitch I saw with you that. Caw!... caw… (Sengupta 256)

In this play the WOMAN reveals her identity first. She says, "It's my story. (Pause) I am her." (Sengupta 255) In the *Ramayana*, Shoorpanakha is presented very ugly with long nails, pot belly, heavy breast and fat. But in some other versions of the *Ramayana*, she was presented extremely beautiful. In this play also, she is presented as a most beautiful woman. "I am the other woman. Beautiful…. Sexy… (Pause.) Hot." (Sengupta 256). In Kamban's Ramayana, she introduced herself as 'Kaamavalli'. In this play also when the MAN asked her about her name then she replied, "I'm Kaamavalli… the goddess of desire…." (Sengupta 260)

Shoorpanakha pleaded to her brother to take revenge of her ill-treatment. But in some other versions, it is written that Ravana had killed her husband whom she loved very much. So she wanted to take revenge. She made Rama and Lakshamana prey of her plan. Because she knew that Rama was very skillful in archery and can kill his brother very easily.

But Sengupta writes that when Ravana went to fight with Rama and Lakshamana, he saw beautiful Sita. Woman was his weakness. He fell in love with Sita and took her away in his palace. But he did not even touch her robes. Shoorpanakha was very disappointed by seeing her brother lovesick. She tells, "My brother went to take revenge for mysake. Instead he came back lovesick… an elephant in masth…." (Sengupta 269)

In this play, the MAN introduces himself as an illusionist. He says:

> MAN: I am an illusionist. Like you. (Pause.) In the other epic.
>
> WOMAN: You mean…
>
> MAN: Jaya, also known as Mahabharata…. The story of that damn Kuru
> clan. They brought my sister all the way down from the hills and
> they… (Sengupta 263)

In some folklores of the *Mahabharata*, there was a story that Kuru attacked and defeated Gandhara. Bheeshma sent proposal for the marriage of king Subala's daughter,Gandhari, with Dharitrashtra who was blind. Kurus kidnapped and made all the male members of king Subala's family prisoners. They gave them a fistful of rice. They starved them. So Shakuni's father decided to give whole grain to Shakuni. He thought that he might remain alive and take revenge. But in the *Mahabharata*, there was no mention of this story. It is written that all the members of Shakuni's family were happy with the marriage. But in this play, Sengupta has written that he accompanied his sister to Hastinapur and stayed there for revenge. Shakuni did not like Kurus but for taking revenge, he became a caring uncle. He did not reveal his reality. Like Shakuni, the Man also hates people. "I don't like people. I hate people." (Sengupta 249) Shakuni did not show that he hate people. Opposite to Ravana, Shakuni was determined to take revenge.

> MAN: When you want revenge, you should be completely fiocussed… every
> part of you must plan the revenge.
>
> WOMAN: Is that what you did?
>
> MAN: (Laughs.) I was so clever…. You should have seen me. I pretended I
> was a friend of the Kurus… that I was on their side. My… my

brother-in-law was such a dummy, just an uncrowned bloody king.

His sons were not even in the direct line of succession. The rightful

heir was actually his brother's eldest son Dharamputra…. So I…

WOMAN: But your brother-in-law's sons were your sister's children too, your

own nephews, weren't they?

MAN: They were my nephews, yes… all of them. But when plotting revenge,

nothing else is important… not my nephews… not me…. Finally …

not even my sister…. I wanted to turn everything to dust. Dust and

ashes. (Sengupta 269)

Shakuni in the Mahabharata became the king after the death of his father. He belonged to

royal family. But the MAN belongs to the hill folk. He wanted to take revenge of her sister's

plight. He says:

No. Nothing as cowardly. She merely…she… deliberately blindfolded herself.

She wore a dark, thick bloody bandage on hereyes… kept it there all twenty-four

hours, all her life. Blinded. Living in constant darkness…. She who was as free as

the birds flying across the hills… why did she choose… choose to blot out the

sun? (Sengupta 265)

Shakuni was the mastermind behind the game of dice. He played on the behalf of his

nephews. He was an illusionist. By the illusion of him, Kauravas were won and Pandavas were

defeated easily. Shakuni started the war and got Pandavas to kill Bheeshma and all Kauravas.

MAN: It was all part of my plan anyway. The five brothers and the wife were

exiled for thirteen years and they left the city as the crowd wailed…. I

did not let my bloody nephews forget their hate. I coaxed their

hatred… I fed it… I inflamed it and finally there was war. (Sengupta 271)

Both of these characters were illusionist. By illusion, Shakuni won the game of dice. "… I was an illusionist. I doctored the dice." (273) He said the WOMAN that she also used illusion to trap the princes. "And you know all the tricks. You use beauty, the illusion of beauty, don't you…." (266)

These two characters strongly feel that they are wrongly interpreted in history. They were made villainous by hiding partial truth related to them. In the *Mahabharata*, it was not mentioned that Shakuni and his family was imprisoned and starved to death.

> WOMAN: But that's what everybody think. That Shakuni was the wicked uncle, the powermonger who wanted his sister's son on the throne. And therefore started the war.
>
> MAN: (Quietly.) I know. That's what I was told too. But when I began reading the Mahabharata…. I felt Shakuni hadn't been given his due. So I did some more reading and finding out, and I heard the story of his imprisonment and his brothers dying and then… I realized…. That he was a victim.
>
> WOMAN: Like Shoorpanakha.
>
> MAN: …. Oh, all right. If Shakuni was a underdog, Shoorpanakha was a … bitch. (Sengupta 276)

He was not happy with his sister's marriage with a blind prince. He could not bear his sister's insult. So he wanted to take revenge. He was made villainous by not revealing the reality

about him. But now they boththink that they are innocent. They played a vital role in the respective epics. But they were not given due respect in the epics. On the contrary they were portrayed as villainous, evil and neglected characters. The MAN says, "In Shakuni's world nobody is innocent…. What I'm doing is not a crime." (280) The WOMAN also says, " We are responsible for each other's crime…. Neither was Shoorpanakha a criminal. (280)

So, in the both epics and in the play, the theme of revenge runs throughout. They are gathered on one stage because they are connected with revenge. They were considered as mere evil characters. In this play also the MAN and he WOMAN did not get what they want. They were still unmarried. The WOMAN searched for true love but she did not find and the MAN was cheated by his brother-in-law and his family. His brother has been killed and his thirteen years old sister was kidnapped, raped and murdered. Hence the man decided to explode a bomb in the airport. Poile Sengupta has brilliantly presented the fusion of the past and the present and the modern characters and the mythical characters.

> The camaraderie shared between the two forlorn characters from two different epics represented one essential fact that no one is born 'evil', only irreconcilable circumstances and conditions force one to change. A Shakuni was born as a result of breach of trust and a Shoorpanakha, when violation and ruthlessness mutilated her innocent love.
> Besides addressing gender dynamics, challenging historical truth and deconstructing the theory of 'good vs bad', Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni delved into the soul of a victim inside the body of a 'villain'. (Mitra, Shoorpanakha and Shakuni Meet to Retell History)

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Conclusion

Stereotypes are the negative beliefs or thoughts about a particular individual, society, caste, culture, race, gender and sex. Stereotypes are used for discrimination and differentiation. These are based on the prior assumptions. So, they have negative essence. They are created for gaining power and influence over others. It is not necessary that they will be logical. They may be logical or illogical. Stereotypes enable us to respond quickly to the situation. But most of them create negative image.

In this research, I tried to unfold truth about two individual stereotypes, Shoorpanakha and Shakuni. The writers of these two great epics created these characters as evil characters. So they are considered villains. People stereotyped them. No one names his/her child's after their names. Shoorpanakha is considered as a stereotype of wicked and succubus woman whereas Shakuni is a stereotype of backstabber and vicious uncle. Now nobody tries to see the reality of their characters. When we take their names, the stereotyped image of them becomes crystal clear before our eyes. They were the victims of society. The writers had concealed the partial truths related to them. So they were presented as evil characters.

Instead of the original texts of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, there are many parodies which present them differently. These parody writings tries to break these stereotypes and present them in a new form. In the later versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and in the folklores, their characters are deconstructed.

Deconstruction is a theory in literature. By deconstruction, it does not mean that we can make a text whatever we like. We cannot ignore the essence of the text. Derrida used a term "graphocentrism" which means the written words are more important than the speech. We should

understand the written words of the text, not the background of the author. He gave another term "decentering". If we slightly shift the centre then meaning and essence of a text will change. The main idea of deconstruction is "… to find that centre and see what happen to the structure if you take it away." (Klages 59) In the *Ramayana*, Rama was taken in the centre and everything was written from his point of view. But if we take Shoorpanakha in centre; the image of Shoorpanakha will completely change. And Rama and Lakshamana will become evil characters because they humiliated and ill-treated her. So in this research her changed image is shown. Now we should no longer consider her as an evil character because we live in an age of deconstruction. And when we take Shakuni in centre; then his character will seem as an oppressed, tortured and insulted character. Kuru will become evil characters because they were the cause of evil qualities in him.

Roland Barthes said that a text is a place where various voices can be heard. So the texts of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are also spaces where we can hear many voices. Among these voices, one voice of Shoorpanakha or Shakuni is that they were not evil characters.

Since ancient time, Shoorpanakha and Shakuni are considered as evil characters. They were created as negative characters to make the reason for the great battles of India. If there had been no Shoorpanakha, there would have been no Ramayana. Because Shoorpanakha was the cause of the battle between Rama and Ravana. And through this battle Rama is shown as a religious person, an 'avtara' (incarnation) of God. He was born on this earth to eradicate the menaces of rakshasas and to establish religion. If the writer had given due respect to shoorpanakha, Rama would not have become the hero of the epic. Like Shoorpankha, Shakuni was also presented as a wicked character who incited hatred between Kauravas and Pandavas.

He was the mastermind of the battle of Kurukshetra. He was given a negative role. If he was not being there, the battle would not be started.

They were presented as evil characters because it was the need of the writer. They needed evil characters to make Rama and Pandavas hero or good characters. So they introduced these characters. But if we deconstruct these texts, we see that they were not the evil characters. They were the vengeance seekers and the victims of society.

Shoorpanakha was not an ugly figure. She was very beautiful. At the time of her birth, her parents gave her the name 'Meenakshi' which means fish shaped eyes. She had the magical power to transform her body. She introduced herself as 'Kaamavalli'. In folktales also, she was given name 'Phulvati' which means beautiful and delicate like a flower. In Indian movies also, she was delineated as one of the most stunning characters of Indian cinema. So she was not an ugly character.

Shoorpanakha was not a succubus because she did not appear in the dream of anyone and did not deceive him. Although she was a rakshasi, she did not kill anyone. After being a member of rakshasa family, she had human qualities. She could feel love which is a very human feeling. She showed pity on Rama. So she refused Khara to kill Rama because she loved him. She was a vengeance seeker. Her brother Ravana killed her husband, Dustabudhi. So she wanted to take revenge of her husband's death. Ravana was so powerful because Lord Brahma had given him a boon. She could not kill him. She waited for many years. At the end she got success in her aim.

Now-a-days we celebrate woman day and we fight for woman rights. If we look back on our ancient texts, even on our two great epics, we will find that woman was humiliated everywhere. In the *Ramayan*, Shoorpanakha was disrespected by Rama and Lakshamana. When

she saw Rama and Lakshamana in the forest, she was attracted toward them. She proposed Rama firs. But he sent her to Lakshamana. And Lakshamana did not refused and told her that he was married. They started playing with her emotions. What was the fault of Shoorpanakha. She expressed her feelings and expression of feelings is not a crime. They incited her to become rude. They cheated her. And whatever Lakshamana did was completely immoral and injustice. He chopped her ear and nose. She demanded only for love. So she was victim.

In the *Ramayana*, it is written that her ear and nose were chopped. It means that she was tortured physically. She might be raped by Lakshamana. Woman was insulted various times in our history. She was also insulted. In The *Mahabharata*, Draupadi was humiliated in an assembly by Kauravas. They tried to disrobe her. All these incidents prove that when a woman was insulted, then this earth had to bear disaster. In our patriarchal societies, whatever a man does is always considered right. He can cut the nose and ears of a woman. He can rape and disrobe a woman because it is considered his right to torture a woman. In Sunderkanda of *Ramcharitmanasa*, a couplet is written in which woman was told as a thing to be beaten. It is said that a drum, uncivilized man, 'sudra', animal and woman all are born to be beaten. Nowhere man is questioned for his deeds. Here again man is in the center. And all rules and regulations of society are created by him.

There are many evidences in history and literature that woman had to go through ordeal to prove her chastity and innocence. In the *Ramayana*, Sita had to prove her chastity through fire ordeal. After proving her innocence, she was abandoned. In *Naga Mandala* by Girish Karnad, Rani also had to prove her innocence through ordeal. Rani, unknowingly, had sexual intercourse with Naga and got pregnant. She did not know that the man who came to her in the form of her husband is Naga. So Appanna gathered the elders of society to prove his wife's infidelity. But

Naga saved her. So Rani had to prove her chastity. But her husband Appanna used to lock her in his house. And he himself spent his day and night in the arms of his concubine. No one said Appanna to go through ordeal. Because men were the creators of the rules and regulations. So they did not made any rule in which a man has to prove his fidelity.

So in the *Ramayana* the battle took place not because of Shoorpanaka, but because of Lakshamana. Shoorpanakha was not an evil character. She did everything for taking revenge. She was not vice character. She was a victim of circumstances. Circumstances and injustice created evilness in her character. She had many good qualities. She had a loving heart full of pity.

Shakuni was also a victim. It is said that Shakuni was the personification of Dwapara yuga. The yugas (ages) are divided in four kinds: Krita yuga (a best yuga), Treta yuga (in which incident of Ramayana took place.), Dwapara yuga (in which Lord Krishna was born) and Kali yuga (a worst yuga, which is now going on). It is said that the evilness of Dwapara yuga were ended by Lord Krishna. He was an incarnation of God. Shakuni is considered a stereotype of backstabber and vicious uncle. If we read him closely, it will clear that he was not an evil character. He was a vengeance seeker. Dhritrashtra and Bheeshma ill-treated him and his family. They attacked on Gandhara and imprisoned them. They were starved to die. Only Shakuni remained alive. So he wanted to take revenge of the death of his brothers and other family members.

Bheeshma sent proposal for the marriage of Dharitrashtra with Gandhari. Dharitrashtra was blind. So after her marriage, she blindfolded herself. Shakuni thought that Bheeshma was responsible for the plight of his sister. So he wanted to end Kuru clan. He hatched many plans

and mixed poison of hatred in the mind of Kauravas and Pandavas. At last he got success in his mission. He was the mastermind behind the battle of Kurukshetra. And he took revenge. But in this process of seeking vengeance, he himself lost his life. Like Shoorpanakha, Shakuni was also a victim of circumstances. He was not an evil character. It is said that 'As you sow, so shall you reap'. At last, Kurus got the fruit of their deeds. No heir of Kauravas remained alive after the war.

In this play *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So said Shakuni*, Poile Sengupta has presented these two mythical characters on one stage because they are connected with the theme of revenge. The theme of revenge runs throughout their life. They did everything to undo the injustice done to them. In this play, the condition of the MAN and the WOMAN is also like that of Shhorpanakha and Shakuni. They meet at the waiting longue of an airport. They wanted to set bomb in the airport. The MAN carried a bomb in his briefcase. So they try to set bomb to take revenge. Like Shoorpanakha and Shakuni, the MAN and the WOMAN were also not evil characters. Their motto was revenge. When the characteristics of their characters were studied in the binary oppositions of good versus, then it became clear that they were victims of circumstances. No character is good or evil. What he or she does depends on the circumstances and perspectives.

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