



Socio-political allegory in Neelakantan's Asura and Ajaya I & II

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Abstract

The article "Socio-political Allegory in Neelakantan's Asura and Ajaya I & II" is basically intended to state the significance of allegory, having a long tradition of being useful in propagating contemporary socio-political issues, in providing certain literary propaganda with a kind of aesthetic that ultimately helps the said works transcend time or clime and yet disseminating certain messages, here caste-related anomalies, with an intention of realising a change in the society. Anand Neelakantan's Asura: Tale of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His People (2012), Ajaya: Book 1: Roll of the Dice [Epic of the Kaurava Clan] (2013), Ajaya, Book II Rise of Kali [Duryodhana's Mahabharata] (2015), the recreated versions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are basically propaganda in the sense that the novels, set in the context of anti-Brahminism or anti-caste stance, propagate indirectly, through allegory, the correlation of caste and class basically because of the prejudiced policies of the ruling conglomerates in India, mainly belonging to the privileged castes. They also connote the malpractices of the political leaders, belonging to both the privileged and underprivileged castes, to use the victims of caste to their advantage. One finding relates to the tendency of the state to brand dissenters as terrorists or traitors giving further sustenance to those, like Takshaka or Durjaya, in their efforts to mobilise people like Ekalavya, Jara, against the state. Intra-caste divisions, standing in the way of the annihilation of caste, can be seen in Takshaka, the Naga leader's inherent hatred against Ekalavya, Jara, the untouchables. The perception reminds one of the intra-caste hierarchical consciousness among the untouchables in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable (1935). Thus, certain socio-political issues, primarily related to caste and Brahminism and their related issues, standing in the way of the realisation of the constitutional ethos of justice, equality and fraternity, are dealt with in the novels with the help of the aesthetic of allegory thus saving the novels from being mere propaganda that would have inflicted transience upon the literary works.

Keywords: Socio-political, allegory, propaganda, caste, annihilation

Introduction

As per M.H. Abrams's A Glossary of Literary Terms an allegory is defined to be "a narrative fiction in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the "literal" or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events" (Abrams 4). The tradition of allegory goes back to Greece, to be traced in Homer, in his attempt to personify abstract ideas like Deimos (Terror) and Phobos (Fear). Plato's Allegory of the Cave is one of the best-known allegories, forming a part of one of his best-known works, The Republic. We see here the narrative of a group of individuals chained in a cave, seeing their shadows on the wall in front of them, comprehending them to be something whereas from philosophical point of view it speaks of something else, thus forming both literal meaning and surface meaning of the same narrative and it is the primary characteristic of an allegory.

The middle English literature is rife with allegorical literary pieces like John Bunyan's Piers Plowman, Everyman where we see storytelling on the surface level and moralizing in the inner level. To move forward, John Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel (1681), based on the biblical episode of the two eponymous characters Absalom and Achitophel, is a political allegory of supreme quality. George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945) is a novella belonging to the genre of political allegory par excellence of the modern era. Here, under the garb of a story of a group of farm animals, organizing rebellion against their oppressors, represented by

the pigs, Orwell demonstrates the political revolution in Russia and the subsequent rise of Stalin. The allegory also connotes the danger of totalitarianism and absolute power in politics as suggested by the worsening condition, subsequent to the abolition of the rule of the pigs.

In Anand Neelakantan's three novels Asura: Tale of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His People (2012), Ajaya: Book 1: Roll of the Dice [Epic of the Kaurava Clan] (2013), Ajaya, Book II Rise of Kali [Duryodhana's Mahabharata] (2015), henceforth to be referred to as Asura, Ajaya I and Ajaya II successively, based successively on the mythologies of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, basically written from the perspectives of caste and its paraphernalia, we find the usage of the aesthetic of allegory through the mouths and behavioural characteristics of certain characters of the two epics. Indian society is basically Hindu society primarily comprising of a caste-ridden social hierarchy characterised with four recognized castes or 'varnas'—(i) Brahmanas, comprising of priests, teachers and ministers, (ii) Kshatriyas, comprising of kings and warriors, (iii) Vaisyas, primarily consisting of the merchant class or tradesmen, and (iv) Shudras, comprising of craftsmen or labour class whose basic duty is to serve the three previous castes. And, besides these four recognised varnas (castes) one unrecognized 'varna' is also there, the so-called Panchamas (menial workers) (Sarat Babu 30). Technically speaking today's Dalit refers to the people referred to here as "Panchamas", the outcastes, having no caste of their own. According to Gavin Flood these

outcastes were totally excluded from the periphery of Vedic traditions or rituals that are supposed to be the primary basis of the Brahminical religion where Brahmins remain the be-all and end-all. According to Flood, “Even the Sudras were within the class system, though forbidden to hear the Veda and outside the twice-born designation, but the Untouchables had no place within the higher social orders, living on the outside of villages ...” (61). In today’s constitutional parlance in India they are the Dalits, constitutionally termed as Scheduled Castes. Thus, whereas, Shambuka in *Asura* belongs to the Shudra caste, characters like Ekalavya, Jara belong to the caste, to be called paradoxically as outcaste. And, Neelakantan has exploited the myths to execute his purpose of holding out discourses on caste or casteism with the objectives of stating the condition of the so-called lower caste people, criticising Brahminism, and propagandising against casteism in general, if not for the annihilation of caste. Accordingly, certain contemporary caste and related class-centric socio-political issues emerge out of the said allegorised discourses quite naturally, concomitant to the treatment of caste as to be found in the recreated and reconstructed versions of the myths.

Discussion

In literary domain Dalit literature connotes a bigger domain than what is associated with the constitutional connotation of the term “Dalit”. Dalit literature comprises within its fold not only the untouchables or outcastes, but the Shudras as well. To consider Dalit literature in the context of a broader perspective, this literature has not remained confined to one specific caste. As, to Arjun Dangle, one of the pioneers in the field of Dalit literature, “‘Dalit’ means masses exploited and oppressed economically, socially, culturally, in the name of religion and other factors. Dalit writers hope that this exploited group of people will bring about a revolution in this country” (Dangle liii). Hence, the novels of Neelakantan have substantially the potential to be belonging to the genre of Dalit Literature taking into consideration the basic characteristics of Dalit literature being “purposive” and having “commitment”, “neither a pleasure-giving literature of fine sentiments and refined gestures, not a narcissistic wallowing in self-pity” (Mukherjee 14). Moreover, according to Limbale, Dalit literature means “writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness” (Limbale 19) though Dalit literature usually covers those written by both the Dalits and non-Dalits, about the Dalits. In typical Dalit literature as the protagonists and the writers are the victims of the caste systems there is little scope for stating anything in an indirect way, through simile, metaphor, innuendo, allegory because the kind of urgency to express grievances against the society or the system lies so rooted in the minds of the Dalit writers that they are hardly oriented towards stating anything rhetorically, smacking of the popular concept of the aesthetics of literature. Dalit literature basically smacks of revolution, turning to the literary pieces to propagandist in nature. But, due to his being a non-Dalit, a Brahmin by caste, Neelakantan does not seem to have that type of urgency. Consequently, he appears to be wallowing in being allegoric in expression.

Asura

The Ramayana has been recreated by Neelakantan in the context of caste associated with several socio-political

issues affecting the concerned domains of the contemporary India. To critically analyse the contemporary concerns of the rulers of certain states of India Neelakantan exploits socio-political allegory, supposed to be hinting at the present practice of secularism that some considers to be endangering the true characteristics of the nation if cautious approach is not put forward in dealing with the religious minorities. Bhadra, the second narrator (the other being Ravana) feels quite worried to think over the concern of Ravana to pose as a secular ruler even if it costs the lives and glory of the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka, the Asuras. “The rights of the minority [here the Brahmins, infiltrating into Sri Lanka with Rama and invited and helped by Vibhishana to occupy religious authority] become an obsession with the ruling class” (*Asura* 302), reminding one of the so-called obsession of certain political parties in India with the Muslims here, “representing around 14.22% to 14.28%” of India’s total population (<https://www.studyiq.com/articles/muslim-population-in-india/#:~:text=Indian%20Muslims%20account%20for%2010.9,of%20138.8%20to%20140%20crore>. Retrieved on 21.09.2025). Like some contemporary political propagators of India Ravana also believes that to be respected in this world as a ruler one has to be secular and should respect every religion, at least to display respect to the religious minorities. He even thinks the minorities to have equal rights over the resources of the country. Original inhabitants of the country fume over the lackadaisical attitude of Ravana in particular and the ruling class in general. The Brahmins start practising untouchability and start treating the Asuras as untouchable though they do not hesitate to occupy the temples of the Asuras, rich sources of wealth. They also start abusing the deities worshipped by the Asuras. But, the ruling class remains quite indifferent to the development. To refer to the contemporary socio-political paraphernalia, the minorities in India here basically refer to the Muslims. To certain political conglomerates, presently dominating the Indian political arena, the Muslims appear to be a threat to the socio-cultural ethos of the nation, as the Brahmins in the novels appear to be to the common people, the common Asuras, though to certain sections of political entities and people secularism, that is, treating all the religious sections with equitable egalitarianism, if not more, is claimed to be compatible with the constitutional ethos.

Similar political allegory has been used by Neelakantan to hint sarcastically at the uneven distribution of wealth in India. According to Oxfam, “The richest 1% in India now own more than 40% of the country’s total wealth, while the bottom half of the population together share just 3% of wealth...” (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-richest-1-own-more-than-40-of-total-wealth-oxfam/article66381944.ece>. Retrieved on 16.09.2025). In Lanka, meaning the present-day Sri Lanka, the kingdom of Ravana, though the nation has been progressing gradually, it means the progress of a few elite classes of people and this progress is being propagandised to make the common people like Bhadra take for granted as their progress too though some appear confused. Ultimately people like Bhadra take to drinking “every day in the local, shabby haunts and raised toasts to the prosperity of our King and the Asura empire” (*Asura* 303). Bhadra’s addiction to drinking issues out of the dejection caused by the uneven distribution of wealth though equal distribution of liquor shop that can be found in certain states of India where the

majority of the state revenue is generated through the sale of liquor. This is a clear allegorical reference to the present socio-economic anomalies in India.

Even the present status of horse trading, switching over from one political party to another, simply to exploit the situation to one's advantage, is also allegorized in the event of Varuna switching side to Rama. Vibhishana, who was sent to Rama by Ravana, the elder brother of Vibhishana, quite disregarding the advice of Prahastha not to do so, as an emissary to Rama, to discuss the issue of the abduction of Sita by Ravana and how to deal with the subsequent situation, has switched side too. Both Varuna and Vibhishana are in the mission to grab more power and coveted administrative position, for Vibhishana it is no less than the crown of the country. But, Ravana is sure that Varuna "would switch loyalties again" (Asura 350) and return to his side if he somehow manages to weaken Rama in a strategic war. The episode is a clear hint at the frequent switching of sides by the Indian politicians out of purely selfish interest and to stay comfortable with the ruling sides. This horse trading is so rampant in the contemporary India, irrespective of political parties of all ideologies—leftist, rightist, caste-based, particular religion oriented, regional, national—that it can not but capture the attention of the author and thus providing the narrative with a rhetorical as well as substantial sustenance in its own way.

Another contemporary political issue, that has been allegorised in Asura, is the gap between the promise and the practice of the rulers of either the Indian states or the centre itself. Almost all the political parties in India roll out election manifesto with startling promises like giving employment to all the youth, providing their bank accounts with lakhs of money, providing the citizens with basic amenities like education, health, residence, developed conveyance, social security, though ultimately the people experiencing a wide gap between the promises and the realisation of the same. Mala, a prostitute by profession, later getting engaged as a sweeper in the palace of Ravana, ultimately becoming the kept of Ravana, giving birth to Athikaya out of her illicit, though public, relationship with Ravana, subscribes to the proverbial saying that power corrupts, no matter who holds the power—Deva, Asura, Gandharva or half castes. Like the prevailing political propaganda of the rulers, assuring emancipation of the people belonging to the marginalised castes and class, "They talk big, like the emancipation of the Asuras, getting even with the Devas, preservation of culture and all that humbug" (Asura 130). Here, the leaders of those belonging to the lower caste hierarchy, like Ravana, become the primary target for critical appraisal. Hundreds of Dalit leaders are there in India who start their political career with the mobilisation of their caste-communities with the promise of supposed amelioration. They promise their people to be raised to the same socio-economic height, as achieved by those belonging to the so-called privileged caste people. But, their ultimate motive gradually gets divulged, becomes just to capture power or remaining close to the party in power, the very party that has so far been propagandizing against their socio-political ideology. But, apparently, they promise to make people of their community realise amelioration of their prevailing condition. The issue of such people has been allegorically presented through Mala. To her, "They [people belonging to marginalised castes] talk big, like the emancipation of the Asuras, getting even with the Devas, preservation of culture [Asura culture

or the indigenous culture], and all that humbug. But finally, ...[they] enjoy a luxurious life in the palace and cling to power" (Asura 130). Starting their political mobilisation with the socio-political discourses of equality ultimately, they fall a prey to their personal socio-political greed. Consequently, a naked gap lies between their promises/preachings and their practices.

Ajaya

In Ajaya I & Ajaya II Neelakantan has dealt with some appalling issues, basically associated with the lower class and castes of people, comprising here of people like Takshaka, Durjaya, Ekalavya, all belonging to the lowest rungs of caste strata, naturally their castes deciding their classes too. Takshaka is one Naga leader, introduced as "a megalomaniac dictator in the making" (Ajaya I 12), exploiting the grievances of the Shudras and the untouchables to his advantage, is also here to exploit the sufferings of his people to his advantage. A clear message is disseminated against indiscriminate killing of innocent individuals in the name of revolution, as organised by the people like Takshaka. In the name of caste and class Takshaka tries to raise one revolution though he has not achieved much success. Hence, he takes up aggressive measures to instigate his people against the ruling incumbents. He desperately takes recourse to violence, sets fire to the hut of Vidhura, supposed to be the most learned, generous, honest and frugal person among the whole lot of administrators, raises the popular slogan of the so-called violent extremists, "LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION!" (Ajaya II 482). The slogan connotes the supposed ideology of the ultra-leftist political organisations, operating mostly in the hilly and wild regions, mostly inhabited by the tribals or the marginalised caste sections of people, suffering from extreme form of poverty and caste discrimination. Takshaka and his people, allegorically representing these sections of people, set fire to Vidhura's hut early one morning. They watch four old people—Kunti, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Vidhura—sitting huddled together crying for mercy as the fire engulfs them and dying in agony. The heart-rending picture speaks of the inhuman nature of the discourse of violent revolution that is indiscriminately passed off as something egalitarian in nature. The episode also is intended to make the readers beware of egoistic, self-centric and inhuman individuals like Takshaka who are in the political domain to exploit poverty and caste-based discrimination, turning the innocent people and good human beings like Vidhura the victims of their socio-political aspiration or greed.

Caste Poses Barriers against Realising Social Stability

In fact, the Mahabharata has been recreated in the novel holistically, with the aesthetic of allegory concerning the issue of casteism, division of people into various castes and related discriminatory behaviour inflicted upon those lying at the lower or the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy. The people belonging to the underprivileged castes, out of their feeling of being deprived and becoming the victims of caste, are sometimes out to pose a threat to the desirable stability that the rulers naturally want to realise.

Takshaka

Takshaka, with the help of his spies, brings Ekalavya, the Nishada young man, into his camp. Due to his being an untouchable, today's Dalit, Ekalavya has been rejected by

the master archery trainer Dronacharya as his disciple. Ekalavya's avid passion for being a great archer leads him to learn archery on his own, having surreptitiously observed the training session of Dronacharya, with the Kaurava princes—Suyodhana [in the Mahabharata Duryodhana], his brothers, the Pandava brothers, including Dronacharya's favourite disciple Arjuna. Ekalavya starts training in archery in the forest with the thrown away crude bow and arrow of the Kuru princes. In one event, as narrated in Ajaya I, one day, while having training in archery, Arjun shoots an arrow, hits the right eye of a puppy, almost seventy feet away from Arjuna, trying to enter the training ground. Ekalavya feels enthusiastic to exploit the moment to show off his skill in archery. With the crude bow and arrow in his store he hits the left eye of the dog, now "hidden almost a hundred feet away ... it was rolling about and running from side to side, then falling onto its back again trying desperately to dislodge the arrow [hit by Arjuna]" (Ajaya I 197). Arjun feels insulted by the "dirty, black urchin" (Ajaya I 199), meaning Ekalavya. Actually, the perception of Arjuna speaks of the typical caste-related hatred of the so-called upper caste people towards the Shudras or the untouchables. Brahmin Dronacharya, who has embraced dharma [religion] in its literal spirit, that is, one should follow one's caste-based profession and should not try to transcend it, now, as a teacher/trainer, instead of appreciating the achievement of Eakalavya, considers Ekalavya to be a threatening competitor both for Aswathama, his son, and Arjuna. His casteist hegemonical instinct immediately feels the urgency of preserving the hierarchy of caste where a Nishada like Ekalavya should never enjoy the privilege of education, learning, training in archery, the domains of the upper/privileged castes, the Brahmins like him or his son and the Kshatriyas like the Kuru Princes. Hence, to get Ekalavya crippled, the Brahmin Guru demands the right thumb of Ekalavya as the gurudakshina [price from a learner, as demanded by the Guru/teacher] that Ekalavya gratifies because the lower caste people are instinctively submissive in nature, especially to those lying at the upper strata of caste hierarchy. But, later on, Ekalavya comes across the liberalism of Suyodhana, a supposed antithesis to the version of caste-based religion as preached by Krishna and the Brahmins like Dronacharya or Dhaumya. Suyodhana is later found to be raising a Shudra like Karna to the position of the King of Anga, rehabilitating Ekalavya, who has lost his thumb in the altar of caste. Subsequently Ekalavya overcomes his submissiveness and now poses inquisitive regarding the right of the privileged caste people to dictate the societal paraphernalia. He is even oriented towards revolting against the prevalent social condition. But, somehow, seeing the anomalies in the camp of Takshaka, he escapes it. Later, one Naga friend from Takshaka's camp tells Ekalavya that "He [Takshaka] always said you would come back once you learnt there was no future for people like us in this country unless we overturn the caste system" (Ajaya I 310). The statement distinctly displays the present caste-infected socio-political system where the victims of caste have to suffer in the hands of both the privileged caste people and their supposed community leaders. Aswasena tries to persuade Ekalavya to come to Takshaka's camp because it is only through their congregation that the wretched and the oppressed like Ekalavya, suffering the

injustice meted out to them by the inequitable caste system, can "overturn the caste system" (Ajaya I 310). Though Ekalavya initially turns derisive as Aswasena sounds like Takshaka with his "bombastic words and dramatic expression" (Ajaya I 310) yet ultimately responds to him with the hope of avenging the loss of his thumb and the loss of the lives of his aunt and cousins. Thus, the people like Ekalavya are going to pose a threat to the stability of the society or the nation as is happening now in India and this is only because of the caste-related anomalies affecting the nation to its core.

Bhishma, the Grand Regent, is apprehensive of the stability of the state especially because of the rise of the individuals like Takshaka or Durjaya. Durjaya, with his unethical ambition and the provision of materialistic and moral sustenance from Shakunihas has raised himself to a position from where he elicits consideration from Bhishma and Vidhura also because he has the might to inflict insecurity upon Hastinapura. According to Vidhura Durjaya is basically responsible for the present precarious situation of Hastinapura and wants to flush out Durjaya. But, Bhishma poses tolerant towards the people belonging to various races and faiths. Vidhura feels avid to retort to Bhishma's principle of tolerance because "the majority of people like himself, the Shudras and the Untouchables, did not have any rights in Bhishma's tolerant land (Ajaya I 237) though there is no denying the fact that in that very morning the Grand Regent has "vetoed Dhaumya's proposal to reserve all Government posts for Brahmins" (Ajaya I 237). The message is that Brahmins and Brahminism are responsible for the present as well as the would-be instability of the state. The discourse reflects the present political discourses of those involved in Ambedkarite or the Dalit-Bahujan (SC/ST/OBC) politics.

Takshaka is supposed to be championing the causes of the Shudras and the Untouchables. He is in favour of seeing them as the rulers of this land subscribing to the perception of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar— "Political Power is the Key to all Social Progress" (Source: https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cy5_DPUxXjd/, Retrieved on 16.08.2025). But, the Nagas in general and Takshaka in particular, nurture the kind of hatred towards the untouchables like Jara or Ekalavya as the upper caste people do. Through his access to the Naga camp, though involuntarily, Ekalavya has realized this fact. And he appears doubtful that if the Nagas would take over the land "things would be different – or perhaps not" (Ajaya I 41-2). But, actually Takshaka's mission is to exploit the grievances of these suffering people to his favour. Otherwise, a king like Jarasandha who has dared to go against prevalent conservatism and appointed untouchable Hiranyadhanus as the Commander-in-Chief of his army would have been at least appreciated by the Nagas. Instead, according to Balarama, "misguided young men like the Nagas, ... would be happy to endanger" (Ajaya I 328) the citizens. The discourse connotes the wealthy condition of some Dalit-Bahujan leaders who hardly appear to be instinctively oriented towards ameliorating the condition of their communities though individually they, exploiting the socio-political condition, have transcended their class at least.

People like Takshaka are also used by those oriented towards destabilizing the socio-political situation for their own personal benefits. Having seen the miserable condition of the shanties of the untouchables and people belonging to

other lower castes, now shifted to the other side of the Yamuna River, considering them to be unfit for residing in a city like Indraprastha, Shakuni considers it to be a “huge opportunity for Takshaka to recruit people into his revolutionary army” (Ajaya I 404). He also decides to bring this to the attention of Durjaya. Even Suyodhana is of the opinion that it is because of the insensitivity of the rulers towards certain communities, in the name of dharma, that has “given birth to Takshaka and Durjaya” (Ajaya I 405). Thus, Shakuni represents one remaining attached with the power centre that is to be exploited to his advantage with the aid of those lying at the bottom of the rungs of caste and class. The socio-politically conscious and contemporary people of India are quite conversant with this situation.

Durjaya

Like Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I, some individuals belonging to the underprivileged castes feel a “sence of injur'd merit” (Prince 31), that is, feeling a sense of being humiliated due to their not having the right to do something that they feel to be capable enough to do. This is the kind of system that has already produced social destabilizers like Durjaya, a man of the gutters, ruling the underworld of Hastinapura and is in the mission of exploiting the identity-less individuals like Ekalavya, Jara, etc. “Crime was his weapon and misery his shield” (Ajaya I 121). Under the garb of allegory this is an obvious propaganda against those involved in caste and class-based politics in India. As most of the people belonging to the underprivileged castes suffer from poverty, people like Durjaya exploit the situation though actually Durjaya is a tyrant who rules “an empire of beggars, prostitutes and petty thieves in the invisible underworld of Hastinapura” (Ajaya I 121). They are somehow able to convince the people like Ekalavya and Jara to rise against the state that has been mistreating them. Jara starts stealing in the house of Kripa who just has rescued him from the beatings of the Brahmins in a temple where Jara tried to grab food items from the offerings given to the idol. Then his notoriety spreads everywhere and certainly Durjaya is quick to get Jara easily sucked into his fold. There are other similar gangs in the city and often gang wars erupt among the groups. The situation reminds one of similar gang wars sporadically erupting in certain Indian cities, though the gangs are not basically based on caste.

Ekalavya

For the proper security and socio-political stability of a nation all of its citizens must inculcate patriotic zeal towards the nation. But, due to the prevalence of casteism the majority of the people of Hastinapur are quite aggrieved with the state due to the maltreatment they have to go through throughout their lives. Ekalavya, having sacrificed his thumb “on the altar of caste had cursed the country he had the misfortune to be born in” (Ajaya I 264). The perception of Ekalavya, a mythical character, gets reflected in the perception of one historical character like Ambedkar, a Dalit-Bahujan icon, considered to be the Father of Indian Constitution. Ambedkar, at his first meeting with Gandhiji in 1931 in London, was questioned by Gandhiji regarding his continuous and consistent severe criticism of Congress tantamounting to criticising the struggle for Homeland. Ambedkar's pithy and pointed response was, “Gandhiji, I have no Homeland, ... No Untouchable worth the name will

be proud of this land” (Roy 43). Thus, the two volumes of the novel in totality—Ajaya I & II—allegorise the contemporary socio-political condition. Later, under the patronage of Suyodhana Ekalavya becomes a captain of an army of Suyodhana, even with his mutilated hands. Now, along with his grievances against caste, he also takes into consideration the anomalies of class, uneven distribution of wealth. When Ekalavya leads an army to attack Dwarka, having seen the pomp of the city he comes to the realization that “Their treasury brims with the wealth they have grabbed by exploiting the downtrodden. We will distribute it among our people” (Ajaya II 69). The statement is a typical discourse of those, appearing to be championing the causes of the underprivileged castes.

Propaganda through Allegory against Branding Dissenters as Terrorists

The present trend of branding the dissenters as terrorists gets reflected in certain episodes of the texts. Employing Takshaka as a mercenary Dhaumya has got Parikshat killed so that by crowning the dead king's child son he can wield more power and can realise better the prevalence of his own brand of caste-based dharma. Now, the wily priest wants Takshaka and his people to be killed so that the Nagas do not pose any threat out of their grievances against the rampant exploitation carried out with the joint efforts of the priestly class and the newly appointed Vaishya Grand Regent Yuyutsu, representing the present-day business or corporate classes. Now, Dhaumya consults the new Grand Regent regarding how to tame the disturbing Nagas and if they can perform the Sarpasatra, that is, sacrificing the Nagas, actually killing the Naga people. The Grand Regent agrees with him. But, the old priest now wants to know what they will do if any one questions such killings. Yuyutsu says that in that case “we can call them terrorists or Rakshasas. We will brand them as traitors or blasphemers” (Ajaya II 500). The saying of Yuyutsu somehow matches with the contemporary Indian polemic of the those in political power. Here, anything going against the ideology of the ruling conglomerates is termed as anti-national or blasphemous, especially in the present context of “Cow nationalism” (Ilaiah xxvii), a term coined by one noted Dalit intellectual Kancha Ilaiah, leading to the banning of cow-slaughter in several Indian states as the cow is considered by some devout Hindus as one revered animal and the ban is supposed to be depriving the beef-eating Muslims in India and also some Dalit and tribal communities, used to consuming beef, a cheap yet nutritious protein-enriched food.

Exploiting Religion and the Social Tension

That religion has become a tool in the hands of the priests and the rulers to exploit the lower caste people as well as common human beings becomes quite clear from the perception of Dhaumya. Regarding the relevance of religion, what comes out of the individuals like the old priest and the merchant reflect the philosophers offering something antithetical to the popular concept of religion. According to Dhaumya “People need Gods and avatars. They want magic.” And, as a supplementary to the perception of Dhaumya Yuyutsu states, “We will give them magic. In return, they give us their freedom” (Ajaya II 500). Yuyutsu wants to keep present social tension continuing. That is why, when Dhaumya has decided, in consultation

with Yuyutsu of course, to declare war, in the name of holding Sarpasatra rituals, on the Nagas, Yuyutsu promptly agrees with him but, to realise his best interest he decides to keep both the warring sides in confidence and “he was hedging his bets by supplying men to Dhaumya and arms to Takshaka. ... How he loved this dharma [religion] business” (Ajaya II 503). He wants Takshaka, the Naga leader, remain free so that the leader can always keep the administration wary of him and his men and “He [Yuyutsu] could inflame it ... whenever profits slumped” (Ajaya II 503). In this narrative one can see the reflection of certain world superpower nations that are also at present involved in hobnobbing with both the warring sides, say for example, India and Pakistan, so that both sides are compelled to buy arms from them to let their arms industry boom.

Conclusion

Thus, unlike the organic Dalit writers, having experiential learning regarding the condition of the Dalits in India, Neelakantan seems to have maintained a balance between the concern for aesthetics of literature and the tendency to be a propagandist. He has used the aesthetics of allegory to propagandise certain socio-political contemporary issues, and, in the process, has been able to invest the literary pieces with both universal and topical traits that one can find in Absalom and Achitophel. If Dryden has based his poem on the Bible, a religious text, to take the readers, especially the Christian readers, into his confidence regarding the contemporary political issues relating to the heir apparent of King Charles II and to deal with one of the serious issues raging the contemporary England, through his Biblical allegory, Neelakantan has also recreated the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, two literary masterpieces of India, considered religiously venerable by the majority of the Indians, the Hindus. Accordingly, the narratives of Neelakantan’s novels deal with certain issues including casteism and associated connotations of class, through epical allegory, that is sure to add supplementary sustenance to the novels ensuring their immortality though the issues typically characterise the elements of propagandas. Direct references to the said issues could have turned the literary pieces to pure propagandas, delimiting their impact upon the readers of all climes because propaganda has a tendency of being topical in nature. But, the presentation of the issues through the rhetoric of allegory and that too through the recreated versions of two vastly read epics of the world is sure to exert positive influence upon the readers, to help the readers be sensitised to several sensational issues of India, especially associated with casteism, that stand in the way of the realisation of the ethics of unity in diversity, of the constitutional principles of justice, equality and fraternity. And, accordingly, though Neelakantan is not the first writer in India to recreate the epics or Indian myths for propagandising the said socio-political issues, he has certainly set the trend of such type of writing or creation in motion. As a few specimens we may mention, in this regard, Kavita Kane’s *Karna’s Wife: The Outcast’s Queen* (2013), Mukunda Rao’s *Shambuka Rama: Three Tales Retold* (2018), Pramod Ranjan’s [Ed.]. *Mahishasur: A People's Hero* (2016), all dealing with caste or Brahminism in different versions. Writers are there also in the fray like Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kevin Missal who have been contributing to the field of recreations of the Indian myths propagating other

social issue like the nuanced concepts of good and bad, spiritual and psychological truths, feminism, or other socio-political issues. And, the thing remaining quite common among the mentioned writers is that with the usage of the rhetoric of allegory they have been able to save their literary pieces from being mere propaganda of a particular time. The aesthetic of allegory is going to help the literary works transcend the boundaries of time, clime or country, and to help them attain immortality in the literary domain.

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