INTRODUCTION

Indian mythology has been the center of attraction for scholars and writers across the globe since centuries. There has been a plethora of evidence to show how scholars across centuries have shown tremendous interest in the Indian mythological tradition. In contemporary times, one of the chief characteristics of this perennial interest is the frequent re-narration of these age old texts from fresh and innovative perspectives. These re-narrations / rewritings provide fresh insights to the mythological texts either by conforming and complying with the values and politics embedded in the texts or by interrogating and subverting them from various perspectives. Mythology, thus in India, is not restricted to historical or academic fields but is a living entity embedded in the social fabric. ‘Mythologies’ forms a major part of the social, political and religious aspect of life in India. The new renditions of the mythological stories are at times articulated to show contemporariness of the epics and to foreground many issues and problems which are still prevalent in society. The most significant aspect of this vast body of narration is that it is not monolithic and has different renditions in various parts of India as well as abroad. Mythology being an inseparable part of Indian folklore, culture, and tradition, there are different perspectives through which the mythology has been narrated. Every new narration has a specific approach and agenda and meant to project a new and fresh perspective to provide new insights to Indian mythology as well as satisfy the objective of the narrator. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two culturally foundational texts of India. These two major grand
narratives of Indian mythology have been the subject of various different renditions not only in contemporary times but also has a history of creative interpretation and re-interpretation since time immemorial. This practice of re-telling has paved way for the re-investigation of the epics for extracting new meanings. These two epics have generally been the subject of glorification of social and moral values among majority of the Indian populace. But the uncritical valorization of mythology has been questioned and new renditions expose this suppressing nature of the epics in the name of reverence towards mythology. This new body, called ‘rewriting’ has become as a tool employed to make the silent/silenced, suppressed and subjugated voices of the epics audible and bring forth the perspective of the marginalized.

Though such writings are not a recent trend, literary history is replete with rendition echoing with new versions of old stories. Epics and mythological stories hold the central position in social, cultural and moral codes of a social system. Holding in themselves many stories and narratives, they get told and retold by the masses for a variety of reasons. Early narrative tradition, chiefly being oral, the stories had different versions in different languages. Apart from linguistic variations, these stories differ in content in different parts of the country or world. For instance, there are many examples which show Sita’s character in a different light in a South Indian version as compared to the Sita in a poem sung by women of Mithila. But in contemporary literary trend, there are a large number of writings which are based on the themes of the original rendition but with counter perspectives. Epics hold in themselves stories of a ‘hero’ whose aim is to uphold the moral, ethical or social
values. The epic usually glorifies its ‘hero’ and celebrates his feats, character and the moral values that he upholds for the preservation of a larger moral order. But in this garb of glorification many unsung and suppressed voices get sunken. Writers look for the tyrannical and subjugating factors as well as stereotyping coordinates (gender, caste, race, color etc.) in the epics and counter them with resistant voices emerging from the margins. In the process the and belief system (which was no more enjoying the privilege of being sacrosanct, but a cauldron of ideologies, political as well as social) the outlook towards epic stories changed, and it got critically scrutinized. This critical outlook is a result of shifting social and cultural discourses which give way to the foregrounding of voices suppressed and unheard. By exploiting different genres, narratives, and practices, epics are questioned and get re-narrated by the writer.

As the rewriting of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata is not a new practice, every age has its own version of these texts. After Valmiki’s version of Rama’s story which portrays Rama unaware of his divine power spending his life as a common man or king, Khamban, Tulsidas and Bhavabhuti in their renditions respectively portrayed Rama as someone divine worth of reverence and his principles to be followed. Chandrabati, on the other hand, unlike popular or mainstream taste, in her Bengali rendition wrote the story of Sita instead of Rama and thus presented the Ramayana from a woman’s perspective. Nabaneeta Deb Sen in an e-article “On Chandrabati's Ramayana: A Woman's Perspective on Ramayana: Chandrabati Ramayana” says,
It differs heavily from both Valmiki (popularly considered to be the original author of *Ramayana*, Valmiki is believed to have come under the spell of Narada and became a devotee of Rama. Later he also enters the text of *Ramayana* as a character) and Krittibas (it was in the early fifteenth century that Krittibas translated Valmiki’s *Ramayana* into Bengali and while doing it, included several local ideas, traditions and culture), the two pillars of the great tradition and the little tradition, the standard Sanskrit text and the standard Bengali text of *The Ramayana*.”(1).

There is also a plethora of regional variants of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* like *Bheel Mahabharata, Assamese Mahabharata, Molla Ramayanamu or Kritivasu Ramayana*. Moreover, folksongs or folktales are also an integral part of the narrative tradition of these epics. Not being monolithic, every narrative has a new perspective to offer. Rewriting as a phenomena, as discussed, being an age old practice has different objectives in different ages. At times the writer aims at conforming to the prevalent and popular ideology of its time while sometimes, the writer’s objective is to make a critique of that ideology and present an alternative perspective through his/her work. In both the ways, it is a deliberate political or ideological intervention on the writer’s part. Thus rewriting is a practice of re-visionsing the text with a fresh perspective, which may include the writer’s point of view or biases or his/her effort to trace voices long suppressed in the grandeur of the original writing. These voices are often representative of a class whose sound might
be disruptive and disconcerting for the religious or emotional harmony of the text if made heard. Many times, in these rewritings these voices are resurfaced or made heard to answer back the subjugation or suppression these classes have faced. They (rewritings) not only narrate the story of the silenced characters but also provide these characters with an opportunity to express their feelings in such a manner that thses voices subvert the conventional hierarchies. Rewritings, thus, in a way, work as the democratization of the source text and act as a resistance to the hegemony and subjugation making it a deliberate political attempt on the writer’s part. Thus it can be stated that rewritings serve as radical writings that are used to dismantle the status quo of the source texts.

The thesis attempts to look at the characters in the two major grand narratives- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - who are marginalized either in terms of gender or caste from fresh perspective and how these marginalized, subjugated characters have been provided a voice to answer back the subjugation and subvert the hegemony in contemporary rewritings. There are a significant number of rewritings which have exposed the biases in the grand narratives and projected many incidents and stories from a fresh perspective by giving a fresh and novel tinge to it as well as by exercising poetic liberty.

The thesis is based on a hypothesis that rewritings give voice to many of the marginalized characters of the mainstream renditions of the two grand narratives under discussion. The objective of the thesis, thus, is to explore the manners in which contemporary rewritings have given voice to these characters whose voices
are marginalized, subjugated or made silent in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. It shall also try to examine the relevance of rewriting mythological classics by drawing a parallel between the mythological contexts and contemporary times.

Some of the Research Questions that the thesis tries to formulate and answer during the course of the thesis are:

- What is rewriting? What are its objectives?
- What are the methods used by the writer in the practice of rewriting?
- How does a rewriting give voice to the characters marginalized in terms of gender and caste? (with special reference to the rewritings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*)
- What is the contemporary relevance of rewritings based on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*?

To look for the answer to these questions, a number of such rewritings are classified and analyzed within certain theoretical frameworks. The thesis tries to identify those characters in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* who are marginalized in terms of gender and caste and how these marginalized, subjugated characters are given in the rewritings the voice to answer back the subjugation and subvert various hegemonies. The thesis attempts a detailed analysis of select rewritings of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* that have made a critique of the epic with gender and caste as the two coordinates.
The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are culturally foundational texts of India. They continue to influence the social, psychological and political culture of the country even in twenty first century. Novel renditions and analysis of the two foundational texts of Indian mythology has been a long trend as they are laden with manifold meanings. But the meaning and interpretations of these texts have acquired new significance with changing times. Many writers of these rewritings expose the subjugating element of these texts and have come up with new renditions. Many writers have critically explained the role of these writings and how they have altered the social outlook towards the epics. For instance, Chandrabati in sixteenth century wrote the *Ramayana* from Sita’s perspective (though the story did not get popularized at that time) whereas Nabaneeta Dev Sen got inspired by this and wrote *Sita Theke Suru* (2000) in Bengali in twentieth century which has proved to be a huge success. Moreover there are many new writings that look into the two texts, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, from fresh perspectives and unfold new meanings and reveals new dimensions. Mahasweta Devi’s *After Kurukshetra* (2005) and Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) fall in this category where new perspectives and concerns are explored. There has also been ample study on number of rewritings based on the sidelined characters of the two epics.

Sisir Kumar Das’s *A History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy* (1991) is an intensive and remarkable work in tracing and analyzing the history of Indian literature. In the book, he has dedicated a chapter to look into the relation between mythology and literature. This chapter
focuses how mythology and literature are a source of inspiration to each other as mythology has given some characters to narrate frequently and re-narrate to literature and literature, by using poetic liberty provides new insights to many mythological characters. The book also makes a survey of some rewritings based on many ignored as well as negatively presented or marginalised characters of mythology as central characters to give new dimensions to mythology.

*Gender and Narrative in The Mahabharata* (2007) by Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black is a collection of eleven essays and brings genuinely new insights to the major gender issues in the *Mahabharata* and the major approaches that have been applied to them, from classical philology to contemporary queer theory, including psychoanalysis and subaltern studies. The book brings together many of the most respected scholars in the field of the *Mahabharata* studies, as well as some of its most promising young scholars. By focusing especially on gender construction, some of the innovative aspects of the *Mahabharata* are highlighted. Taking into account the feminist scholarship, the contributors see the *Mahabharata* as an opportunity provider to frame discussion of gender, not only in terms of socio-historical roles of men and women but also in terms of economics. Analysis through most recent trends in gender and literary theory make it an incredible work.

*In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology* (2009) edited by Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale is a collection of interviews, articles, folk songs, to look into the character of Sita through performing arts and excerpts from many novels and short stories based on the character of Sita. Sita’s mysterious absence in the mainstream
renditions is the focus point around which the book revolves. The book explains the need of revisiting the *Ramayana*, to reopen the debate on her birth, her days in exile, her abduction, her trial by the fire, the birth of her sons in a secluded forest and moreover, her denial to undergo the trial by fire for the second time. She is presented as a brave, self-sufficient woman in many performing arts and folksongs much dissimilar to her presentation in the mainstream tradition. This image of Sita has been the focus point of discussion in the essays. Not much revered by feminist scholars and projected as a silent bearer of injustice, her projection as a sufferer is the central target of all the writers for whom she is not the silent heroine but one who knows how to answer back. The book visits the mythological portrayal of Sita in order to resurrect her from a stereotyped image and highlight the strength of her character. Namita Gokhale, the co-editor of the book writes,

> Janaki, the daughter of Janaka, was a strong young woman who could lift the Hara, Shiva’s bow, with one arm while swabbing the floor with the other in her father’s house. Then why do I picture her weeping? When and why did she become a figure of weakness rather than strength? (2)

Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale in this book through a number of commentaries, interviews, and survey of some creative interpretation try to dig into the gender biases of popular renditions as well as foreground Sita’s and other feminist versions of the story. The book is broadly divided into four sections. The first section is dedicated to the comparison between Sita and other women characters of the text and tries to bring to the light the contrast between them. Sita is juxtaposed
with Kaikeyi, Tara and Shoorpanakha. This section also makes a comparison between Goddess Kali, Draupadi, and Sita. Sita’s identity, her story of the birth, her presentation, etc. are few questions the writer puts forth in the opening section of the book. The second section comprises of a number of interviews and conversation. The editors speak about the relevance of Sita’s story as well as the Ramayana in contemporary times. Sonal Mansingh, an eminent classical dancer and Nilimma Devi a Kuchipudi dancer through their performances based on Sita’s character, try to uncover many hidden subtexts of her life. The book also makes a survey of documentary Laying Janaki to Rest and Nina Pauley’s Sita Sings the Blues where Sita is the central focus of the text. But the forte of the book lies in its survey of regional variants of the Ramayana where the writer tries to bring to the light the lost version of Sita’s story. From Chandrabati to contemporary daily soaps, the story of Sita has traveled a long journey. In folklores of different languages, Sita is a living entity. But the book points out how women from many parts of the country did not let Sita’s questions die and sung about an outspoken Sita in their songs. The anguish towards Rama and patriarchy and empathy towards Sita is an integral part of these folklores. Especially in the songs in Mithila (Mithila is believed to be the birthplace of Sita) she is the unhappy daughter, and the root cause of her grief is Rama. So the folksongs do not spare Rama because of his divinity but blame him for the grief of their daughter. Sita is the living entity in these songs.

Linda Hess’s article “Lovers’ Doubts: Questioning the Tulsi Ramayan” in Paula Richman’s Questioning Ramayan: A South Asian Tradition (2001) also illustrates many versions of the Ramayana and says that to look for Sita’s voice and
other inclination and manifold meaning in the narrative tradition of the *Ramayana*, one needs to look into multiple voices and feminist interpretation of the text apart from the mainstream rendition. “*Ramayana* is a “politicized” text” says Linda Hess and puts certain questions which should be the ground for the inquisition into the narrative tradition of the epic. The essay also explores the validity and importance of questioning in the epic-tradition and how it helps in the rising popularity and acceptance of the epic. Apart from this essay, there are other articles like “Grinding Millett but Singing of Sita: Power and Domination in Awadhi and Bhojpuri Women’s Songs” by Usha Nilsson, “Yes to Sita, No to Ram: The Continuing hold of Sita on Popular Imagination in India” by Madhu Kishwar or “The Voice of Sita in Valmiki’s *Sundarkanda*” by Sally J Goldmann Sutherland which foreground multiple dimensions of the Ramayana tradition.

*Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (1991) edited by Paula Richman engages with the different and a number of narratives of *the Ramayana* which are celebrate kingly or dutiful virtues of Rama, the feminine virtues of Sita or about marginalized version. The book comments that while most scholars continue to rely on Valmiki’s Sanskrit *Ramayana* as the authoritative version of the tale, the contributors of this volume do not. Their essays demonstrate the multifocal nature of *The Ramayana* by highlighting its variation according to its historical context, political scenario, regional literary tradition, religious affiliations, intended audiences and genre. The contributors focus on this multiple tradition and narration of the *Ramayana*. Socially marginal groups in Indian society have recast Rama’s story to reflect their own views of the world, while on
other hand the epic has become basis for teaching about spiritual liberation or the
demand for political separatism. Historians of religion, scholars of South Asia,
folklorist, cultural anthropologist- all have a refreshing perspective of this tale and
their own version of the story. The book comments on the tradition of Ramayana
beginning from oral tradition to televised representation. The book is broadly
divided into three parts. The first part includes three chapters including the
introduction by Richman. The next chapter is A. K. Ramanujan’s (in)famous essay
“Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation”.
This essay is discussed in detail later in this chapter. In the next chapter, writer
Frank E. Reynolds makes a detailed comparative analysis of Ramkathas in Hindu
and Buddhist traditions. The second part discusses telling of the Ramayana as
“refashioning and opposition”. Comprising five chapters this section talks about
many unsung stories as well as less celebrated versions of the epic. In the third and
last section of the book, essays about the subverted as well as personalized reading
of the Ramayana are included. Thus, the book is an attempt to analyze many
Ramayanas emerging from different sections of the society which make into the vast
narrative tradition of the Ramayana stories including essays and texts which
question the mainstream renditions which are tagged as ‘authoritative’ versions of
the Ramayana.

*Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation* (1987) by A K Ramanujan is a paper presented in a conference in University of Pittsburgh on the topic “Comparison of Civilizations”. It summarizes
the history of Ramayana and the way it has spread across India and Asia over a
period of 2500 years or more. The objective of the paper was to bring to light how the story of Rama has undergone change across cultures and over a period of time. The number 300 in the title of the essay is taken from Camille Bulcke’s work to point out that it is an underestimated number of *Ramayana* narratives. His essay is centred on only five narratives- Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, Kampan’s *Ramavataram*, Jain telling, Thai *Ramakien* and the South Indian folk tellings. He, through a number of illustrations denies the existence of an original *Ramayana* and tradition of labelling Valmiki’s *Ramayana* as the source text to judge the authenticity of *Ramayana* stories and considers it as a tradition.

*Ramayana through Ages* (2007) by Awadhesh Kumar Singh discusses how different cultures have derived different morals from the *Ramayana*. In an essay ‘Apne Apne Ram Aur Uske Uttar/ Adhunik Ulzav’ Singh has illustrated study of different images of Rama and has described how society selectively chooses the image of Rama suitable to its purpose. The essay is a comment on distorting the real image of Rama sometimes by society and many times by religious fanatics. Rama has different images and there are multiple approaches to look into his character. Singh has looked for those approaches in his book.

“Lady sings the blues: when Women Retell Ramayana” (2013), a lecture by Nabaneeta Dev Sen, who has also written *Sita Theke Suru* (It All Begins With Sita), a story of Sita through Rama’s perspective is a lecture on women retelling of the *Ramayana*. The book throws light on the issues which are highlighted when a woman presents her narrative of the epic *Ramayana*. She writes that women in the
epic across the world are either abducted, molested, pawned or rescued and have nothing much to offer and incidentally all the celebrated epics are written by male writers. But after reading the story of Ramayana by some women writers she felt that their narratives had a different version and new and fresh perspective. The essay comments how patriarchy has used Sita’s myth to silence women’s voice and has promoted stereotyped image of Sita. The mainstream tradition presents her as “devi”. But this eventually suppresses her voice that can create a stir in the patriarchal system. In the retellings (Sen has included folksongs and folktales sung by woman of villages as her focus) Rama’s myth and status is questioned and Sita does not remain a weak or docile creature there. Besides her duty as a daughter, wife and mother, she is also a woman with dignity. She has been glorified and her doomed state is not celebrated in the name of sacrifice. The article also focuses how the new formulations of the image of Sita address the issue of individuality, freedom and power.

Jasbir Jain in her book Indigenous Roots of Feminism: Culture, Subjectivity and Agency (2011) talks about various roots of feminism in India, having their origin in social conditions as well as mythological representations. She has categorized several ways of reading and interpreting the past. The book also emphasizes that feminism is “not just an ideology of resistance to patriarchal control but a movement that seeks integration of public and private space and collapsing of division between two different sexuality and moral values”.(10) She has argued that rewritings in a way act as a resistance against the portrayal of the suppressed in
mythology. She writes- “I have worked with contemporary interpretations, retellings and rewritings as a continuation and questioning of the past at the same place”.(xiii) Not only this, how the cultural role model, as they have percolated down the ages, have emphasized this, thus depriving women of agency. The book also highlights how gender is constructed by the interplay of both femininity and masculinity. Further the manner in which retellings have altered them is equally relevant, for the change marks either the resistance or the shift in social perception of the role, or it may also signify a shift of focus because of social location of the narrator or the narrators.

The story of *Ramayana* is not limited to India. In the introduction of *Retelling The Ramayana: Voices from Kerala* (2005) edited by Sarah Joseph and C. N. Sreekanthan, K. Satchidanandan Nair has made a survey of different versions of Rama’s story and classified it according to different approaches and contrasting voices through which the story of *Ramayana* is looked into. For example-Balinese, Cambodian, Chinese, Javanese and Buddhist *Ramayanas* are equally popular in their version offering the same tale with a twist. Apart from this, the introduction also talks about the representation of *Ramayana’s* story in various dance and art forms.

Romila Thapar in the foreword of Paula Richman’s *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition* (2000) says- “Religious narratives have multiple versions. Each version is also a cultural item and should be viewed as such. Each has a social clientele which gives it legitimacy and recognition of this social clientele is essential.” (ii) The foreword highlights the issue of originality when it comes to the
epic and discusses the significance and essentials of having an authoritative version. She discards Valmiki’s version’s position as the authoritative text. She also comments on the regional variants of Ramayana along with televised versions of the text. In the foreword, she raises questions of survival of regional or local versions. She also drags the attention towards the causes responsible for the survival of one version or retelling over other. Citing reasons for existence and origination of multiple renditions of the epic she says,

With the growth of greater consciousness of gender status, there will have to be some reflections of the way in which the story is presented from the songs of women, songs which project the emotions of Sita or any other woman in the story in a different light from that with which we have been familiar in the homogenized version. These may be seen as degrees of unraveling the authoritative version and therefore innocuous. (vi)

Written as a foreword to the book, the essay exposes multiple reasons responsible for the emergence of new renditions and counter narrations of the epic. It also explains that how the many versions that constitute the narrative tradition of the Ramayana by being inclusionary negates the parochial view that it is only a sacred, authoritative and single text.

In the review of Amruta Patil’s graphic novel Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean entitled as “The Best of Sutradhaars”, (2013) Alice Albinia comments on the narrative style of The Mahabharata and how by choosing a goddess-Sutradhaar, (The Mahabharata has only male narrators within the epic- Vyasa to Vaisampayana
to Ugravasa or even birds, but no woman) Patil shifts the focus onto the role of women and explains how she brings the subservient to the central. A woman’s take on the epic changes the effect of it. The review also elaborates how the woman’s version digs into the events considered less significant and elapsed in male versions and brings to the centre some new perspective by offering fresh insights.

Malini Saran in an article entitled “So Many Ramayanas” (2013) in Biblio, a monthly magazine, reviews two rewritings based on the story of Ramayana. The first review is of Breaking the Bow: Speculative Fiction inspired by The Ramayana, edited by Anil Menon and Vandana Singh that is an anthology of twenty four stories based on the Ramayana and the second review is of Samhita Arni’s The Missing Queen, a thriller, again based on the story of Ramayana. Saran comments that how the effect of the epic changes when a character is presented in a different light. Writers across the world have experimented with this epic in this manner bringing forth new versions and facets of the Ramayana. In the second part of her review, she critically analyses Arni’s text and categorizes as a whodunit genre. Outlining the story of the text, she mentions how by changing the context and playing with the presentation of the characters, Arni cleverly raises many contemporary issues in a subtle manner. She critically points out the covert reason of expansion of empire behind war between Ram and Ravana and how Sita is only an excuse to attack Lanka. She concludes by saying that how such energetic stories make Ramayana an ‘ever-evolving’ work. She writes- “these energetic new works illustrating the
extraordinary flexibility of its capacious story telling act as a fitting reply to those who see Ramayana as a fixed, close narrative.'(33)

In the book *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (2000) edited by Alf Hiltebeitel and Katheline M. Erndl, Hiltebeitel in his essay “Draupadi’s Question” comments on Mahasweta Devi’s story of Dopdi Mejhen, a tribal woman who participated in Naxalite resistance to landlord oppression. She is a contemporary version of Draupadi. He deliberates at different questions of Draupadi which are still relevant and are left unanswered.

Devdutta Patnaik’s two rewritings based on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* respectively also comment on the tradition of rewriting. His work *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010) comments significantly on the changes the epic has undergone time to time along with the regional variants of the epic which mutated and affected the epic and its progress. While narrating his version of the *Mahabharata*, he comments on the framing of his story as well as the source of his plot and variations. He most of the time, exhibits how folktales and regional retellings of epic altered or mutated the popular versions of the epic at times. Not only this he also borrows from various sources and while borrowing he also gives references of his sources.

His second rewriting based on the *Ramayana, Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* (2013) is a feminist interpretation of the epic. Patnaik, in a meticulous manner has given a detailed account of Sita’s life along with a survey of regional narratives about the life of different characters of the *Ramayana*. He draws attention
towards many oral, visual and written writings and compositions in different times, in different places, by poets with their own version and articulation loaded with their personal biases and new perspectives of the stories. He writes- “That there are many Ramas and many *Ramayanas* is a recurring theme in Indian mythology. It indicates that life is not linear; there is no full stop…(314) He cites from various regional Ramayanas and presents many characters in new light. He presents a picture of various Ramayanas across the globe and history through two images.
A Few *Ramayana* Beacons across History

Before 2nd century BCE: Oral tellings by travelling bards
2nd century BCE: Valmiki’s Sanskrit *Ramayana*
1st century CE: Vyasa’s Ramopakhyan in his *Mahabharata*
2nd century CE: Bhasa’s Sanskrit play *Pratima-nataka*
3rd century CE: Sanskrit Vishnu Purana
4th century CE: Vimalasuri’s Prakrit *Paumachariya* (Jain)
5th century CE: Kalidasa’s Sanskrit *Raghuvamsa*
6th century CE: Pali *Dashratha Jataka* (Buddhist)
6th century CE: First images of Ram on Deogarh temple walls
7th century CE: Sanskrit *Bhattakavya*
8th century CE: Bhavabhuti’s Sanskrit play *Mahaviracharita*
9th century CE: Sanskrit Bhagavat Purana
10th century CE: Murari’s Sanskrit play *Anarghya-Raghava*
11th century: Bhoja’s Sanskrit *Champu Ramayana*
12th century: Kamban’s Tamil *Irandavaratam*
13th century: Sanskrit *Adbyatma Ramayana*
13th century: Buddha Reddy’s Telugu *Ranganath Ramayana*
14th century: Sanskrit *Adibut Ramayana*
15th century: Krittivasa’s Bengali *Ramayana*
15th century: Kandali’s Assamese *Ramayana*
15th century: Balaram Das’s Odia *Dandi Ramayana*
15th century: Sanskrit *Ananda Ramayana*
16th century: Tulsi’s *Avadhth Ram-charit-manas*
16th century: Akbar’s collection of *Ramayana* paintings
16th century: Ekath’s Marathi *Bhavarth Ramayana*
16th century: Torave’s Kannada *Ramayana*
16th century: Ezuthuchanan’s Malayalam *Ramayana*
17th century: Guru Govind Singh’s Brah *Gobind Ramayana*, as part of *Dasam Granth*
18th century: Giridhar’s Gujarati *Ramayana*
18th century: Divakara Prakasa Bhatta’s *Kashmiri Ramayana*
19th century: Bhamabhakta’s Nepali *Ramayana*
1921: Cinema, silent film *Seti Sulochana*
1943: Cinema, *Ram Rajya* (only film seen by Mahatma Gandhi)
1955: Radio, Marathi *Geet Ramayana*
1987: Television, *Ramanand Sagar’s Hindi Ramayana*

*Dating is approximate and highly speculative, especially of the earlier works.*
Gourhari Behera in an essay “Re(visioning) Draupadi: Interpretation in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusion*” (2015) writes how Divakaruni has brought to the centre the enigmatic figure of Draupadi and how the change in narrator has changed the narrative. As Divakaruni feels dissatisfied with the portrayal of women in the epic where they remained ‘shadowy figures’, she engages herself with the feminist interpretations of the text and presents a new outlook. Behera examines how *The Palace of Illusion* not only throws light on the silent aspects of *The Mahabharata* but also exposes highly contemporary issues like femininity, identity, narrativity and agency. He also highlights how gender becomes an important trope in the novel.

Another essay “Iyengar’s Sitayana: Re-envisioning A Psychic Integral Feminine World-View”, (2015) by Satish Kumar Hari and Charulata Verma published in a journal Oasis has shown how the Sita is portrayed as an exemplary figure in Indian culture and how this portrayal has paved way to an ideological projection of Sita’s character in human psyche. The paper also presents multiple dimensions of the character of Sita which could not find echo in popular mainstream renditions. The poem “Sitayana” talks about womanhood, motherhood, environmental concerns and her self-transcendence. Hari and Verma not only ponder over the presentation of Sita but also analyze the portrayal of other woman characters.

Radhika Iyengar in an e-article entitled “Diwali Special: A *Ramayana* but not about Ram” (2017) writes about the circumstances that paved the way for the
writing of Chandrabati’s *Sitayana* and compares it to Atkuri Molla’s *Ramayanum*. Chandrabati makes Sita ‘the beating heart of the epic’ and Rama as an ordinary flawed man. Atkuri Molla, a writer from Andhra Pradesh, also rewrote the *Ramayana* story but mostly exempted the parts belonging to Sita. This at the time of its narration became a success while Chandrabati’s story was a failure initially. The article explains that Molla’s narrative being more of a devotional writing was appreciated by the court, religious leaders or patriarchal setup while Chandrabati’s narrative was received as an oppositional writing disrupting the social setup. So the article also engages in disseminating the factors which make a piece of writing successful or failure and how these factors are politically or socially committed.

Sudhirendra Sharma in an essay “The Forgotten Princess” (2016) has reviewed Kavita Kane’s novel *Sita’s Sister*. As the book is based on the character of Urmila, the younger sister of Sita and wife of Lakshmana, it gives voice to the silenced character of her and questions her projection in earlier narratives. He writes- “By giving a fictional spin to the grand old story the author peeps into the life of prominent unsung characters and offers insights into her mind and her action.” He commends Kane for bringing to the light one of the unsung and unappreciated characters of the mythology as well as the fictional twists and turns she provides to her character.

Reena Rajbanshi in her article “Rewriting Mythology: an Analysis of C.S. Laxmi’s *Forest*” published in International Journal of Literature, Language and Humanities sees a parallel between the story of Sita and Chenthiru, the protagonist
of the novella *Forest*. She argues that how writers revisit and question these age old myths to create a new one in order to give voice to the silent characters. She also argues that how important it is to question the myths which appear suppressing in contemporary times as this act of questioning makes the myth alive and afresh.

In a literary festival “Lit for Life 2014” organized by “The Hindu” a session discussion under the topic “Reinventing Mythology- The Art of Rewriting Mythology” was organized where the panel comprising Paul Zacharia, Vinapani Chawla, A R Venkatachalapathy and K Satchidanandan commented on the art and objective of renarrating mythological stories in contemporary times with a new ideological approach. Satchidanandan puts to the light how Eklavya or Shambhuka from *the Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* respectively, become a focal point for discussion and analysis in dalit discourses while Sita is a concern for feminist writings. He speaks how many writers try to draw a parallel between mythological narratives and contemporary situation by illustrating examples like Dharmaveer Bharti’s *Andha Yug* (1962) and Girish Karnad’s *Yayati* (2007). He also comments on the regional variants of mythological texts and gives examples from Sarah Joseph’s and K Shrikanth Nair’s *Retelling the Ramayana* which is a compilation of four narratives based on the story of the *Ramayana*. He further elaborates how regional narratives are also a part of the larger frame and offer new insights to the popular stories. They also work as counter texts positing a different stand. He also comments on regional rewritings and says how they are a part of the mythology. Further in the lecture Paul Zacharia points out that mythology has always enjoyed
the privilege of being a sacrosanct narrative and any attempt at questioning and subverting the ideological premises of these narratives is vehemently refuted. Not only this, any alteration or deviation from these “sacrosanct” renditions is considered blasphemous by many conservatives. But in contemporary times there has been an upsurge in their rewritings mythologies are getting rewritten from different perspectives and with new ideological commitments and is also popularly accepted.

The thesis is broadly divided into five chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The present chapter is the introductory chapter of the thesis. This chapter introduces the notion of rewriting as well as the history of rewriting. It explains how rewriting is not merely restricted to contemporary writings but has been a frequently experimented genre. The chapter also presents the research questions which would be the center of the thesis as well as the hypothesis. Further, the chapter also makes a review of the existing literature related to the rewritings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The second chapter “Rewriting: Nature, Feature and Ideology” discusses the theory of rewriting. Further the chapter gives a detailed survey of multiple rewritings across the world where many canonical texts are rewritten with new perspectives to show that rewriting is not a very recent phenomenon but has a long history. After discussing rewritings in general, the chapter has further discussed many contemporary rewritings based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the different coordinates of contemporary rewritings.
The third chapter “Rewriting Gender: Sita, Urmila, Draupadi” is based on rewritings where stereotyped presentation of the three characters Sita, Urmila and Draupadi in the mainstream rendition has been questioned and critical evaluation of select contemporary rewritings has been done which have given voice to these characters. For Sita’s character Devdutt Pattnaik’s *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*, (2013) Samhita Arni’s *The Missing Queen*, (2013) and *Sita’s Ramayana*, (2011) a graphic novel by Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar have been taken. Urmila’s character has been studied in the light of two texts- *Sita’s Ascent* (2012) by Vayu Naidu and Kavita Kane’s *Sita’s Sister* (2014) Draupadi’s character has been analyzed through Pratibha Ray’s *Yagnaseni* (1984) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusion* (2008) and Saoli Mitra’s *Five Lords Yet None a Protector* (2005).

The fourth chapter “Rewriting Caste: Sumitra, Shambhuka, Karna, Ekalavya” focuses on the character which are seen victimized in terms of caste in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* respectively, by contemporary writers. Four characters are chosen to discuss this marginalization. Sumitra’s character has been discussed through Devdutt Pattnaik’s *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* and Kavita Kane’s *Sita’s Sister*. For the character of Shambhuka, Devdutt Pattnaik’s *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*, and Daya Pawar’s poem “O Great Sage” is taken for study. Karna’s character is the locus of three texts- Shivaji Sawant’s *Mrityunjay: The Death Conqueror* (1989) Ramdhari Singh Dinkar’s *Rashmirathi* (1952) and Kavita Kane’s *Karna’s Wife* (2014). Ekalavya’s character is also
evaluated through three texts- Hansa Pathak’s *The Offering* (2014) Shankar Shesh’s *Ek Aur Ekalavya* (2007) and Shivshankar Pattnaik’s *Ekalavya* (1980). The chapter also talks about the intersection of gender and caste where a woman is marginalized to a greater extent if she belongs to the so-called ‘lower caste’ of the society. The chapter through number of examples and texts shows the double marginalization of these characters.

The last chapter makes the conclusion of the thesis. The chapter shows how and to what extent the hypothesis of the thesis has been justified. The chapter also verifies the research questions presented in the introductory chapter of the thesis. The chapter also shows how each chapter has individually accomplished the objective of the research.

Contemporary rewritings of mythology are replete with the narratives of subjugated/marginalized characters, which are given voice in contemporary writings. These writers believe that in mainstream renditions many characters do not get adequate space and voice or are not projected in their full capability. Many times, in these rewritings these voices are made to resurface or heard to answer back the subjugation or marginalization these classes have faced. They (rewritings) not only narrate the story of the silenced/ marginalized characters but also provide these characters with an opportunity to voice their concerns in such a manner that these voices subvert the conventional hierarchies. Rewritings, in a way, are democratization of the source text and act as a resistance to the hegemony and subjugation making it a deliberate political attempt on the writer’s part. Thus it can
be stated that rewritings are radical in their purpose because they are used to
dismantle the existing hegemonies of the source texts as well as the contemporary
society as it is written more for the immediate reader and his/ her social surrounding
than merely to interrogate the original rendition. Rewritings, thus, in a way have
tried to do justice to the suppressed voices and work as a resistance against the
hierarchal social and political structure. It has turned the epic into timeless classics
and a part of living tradition capable of engaging with contemporary issues and
problems and has been a source of inspiration for thousands of years.