Conclusion

Indian mythological tradition in India has its root deeply embedded in its culture, tradition and folklore. Being an integral part of the narrative tradition, their innumerable renditions across time and space make the mythology a part of living entity. As the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are integral parts of Indian mythology, their multiple renditions are also equally acclaimed and popular. These new renditions or rewritings of the two epics (in contemporary parlance) provide alternative dimensions to the monolithic reading of the epics. They subvert and counter question the mainstream renditions and have a potential to provide fresh insights to the epic. Writers have based their version of the epics against several backdrops based on their ideological commitment and have tried to foreground their ideological leanings by narrating either a particular episode or incident from ideological positions or ingeniously adapting the story in a new setting. These interpretations have given the rich epic tradition of India a new dimension.

As discussed in preceding chapters, the idea of rewriting is an age old practice and serves manifold purposes. It can be conformist and echo the same ideals presented in source text while at times, the writer’s objective can be to make a critique of the established ideology and to offer a new perspective through his/her work. In both the ways, it is a deliberate political or ideological attempt on
the writer’s part to express his/her commitment as well as to influence the readership. The thesis by discussing select texts and characters, has examined how rewriting is a practice of re-visioning the old text with a new perspective. The thesis has also meticulously analyzed how rewritings are influenced by the personal ideological conviction of the narrator as well as the social and cultural backdrop against which the story is narrated. The social and political position of the author is also responsible for an alternate approach towards epics. The thesis also explains the role of adaptation and presents the contemporariness of epics by placing the age old story in contemporary setting. It is an attempt to restore the relevance of those texts in the present world or to show how the same old problems and issues recur throughout history in a particular pattern. Among number of reasons to rewrite, the first and foremost cause is to exert or subvert power equations of a text. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata both are tales of ‘royal Kshatriya men’. Like the mainstream popular renditions, rewritings too have their own centre of power which at times interrogate the narrative of mainstream rendition also question their power equation. Some major canonical texts and their rewritings across the world are thus discussed in the preceding chapter to substantiate the arguments that rewritings are not naïve piece of literary craft but written with certain ideological convictions.

The thesis has tried to explore the relevance of rewriting as an area of research and how rewritings function. Rewriting is a reassessment of a text from an alternative perspective. Radical rewritings look for those sections or narratives
which fail to satisfy a particular section of the society by showing their disagreement over the ideology presented in the source text. It celebrates the perspective of many unsung (also negatively and pessimistically interpreted) characters. So the thesis has exhibited that while rewriting a text from a new perspective, the dominant ideology is contested and challenged exposing the interplay of power in that text. This makes rewriting an attempt that shifts the master centre of original rendition to another centre whose perspective might affect, change or challenge the ideology of the source text. In such rewritings, the narrative is recreated in such a way that that attempts to breakdown the ideologies and voices put forth by the original rendition. For instance, it brings the peripheral characters to the centre i.e. major characters are replaced by minor characters giving them an opportunity to articulate their version of the story. Rewritings, thus, bring to light the notions of a text that has remained unchallenged for a long time by giving voice to a character that has remained silent over a long period of time. This shift in voice provides a new alternative to the source text by uncovering certain covert, unsettled questions which go unanswered or not even raised in original rendition. Rewritings, thus by intervening in the narratives, seek space for the silent, subjugated and marginalized. The thesis has explained the notion and objective of rewritings in terms of caste and gender as their coordinates. In chapter 1 of the thesis the notion and historical background of rewriting has been discussed along with objective of the thesis. The thesis has been divided into five chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. The introductory chapter gives a survey of critical analysis of existing rewritings and
explores relevance of two major grand narratives— the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in contemporary times. The thesis has explored how some characters in these two major grand narratives— Ramayana and Mahabharata are marginalized either in terms of gender or caste and how these marginalized, subjugated characters have been provided a voice to answer back the subjugation as well as subvert the hegemony. It has also discussed how significant number of rewritings have exposed the prejudices in the grand narratives and projected many incidents and stories from a fresh perspective by giving a fresh and novel tinge to it where writers have tried to fill the gaps and silences of the epics with a fresh setting or introduction of new perspective.

The second chapter of the thesis is entitled as “Rewriting: Nature, Feature and Ideology”. The chapter provides a theoretical framework of the concept of rewriting. Further the chapter explores different components and classification of rewritings based on their ideological thrust and has shown how new renditions of mythological stories help in making the epics a part of living tradition. The chapter has given a detailed survey of contemporary rewriting (other than mythological) and how various renditions of the two grand narratives of India reveal that there has been a consistent attempt at looking at the two epics from various radical perspectives. In the process what gets revealed is the way by which contemporary authors engage ideologically with these age-old revered texts to give them a fresh perspective. Radical rewritings across the globe exhibit a tendency of dissent towards authoritative forces and earlier narratives of
conformity. The chapter has uncovered a number of coordinates of rewritings and discussed them briefly. It has also discussed how the marginalized and tormented characters of the two epics are central to contemporary rewritings and has pointed out certain reasons for the change in perspective towards these characters.

The third chapter “Rewriting Gender: Sita, Urmila, Draupadi” has explored how characters marginalized in terms of gender have been given a voice to counter their subjugation through rewritings. Writers have incorporated various strategies to highlight the voices of women in the epic as well as their feminist interpretation. Sita and Urmila from the Ramayana and Draupadi from the Mahabharata are the characters whose perspective and narrative have been presented in this chapter with the help of significant rewritings. These rewritings question the ideological portrayal of Sita’s silent bearing, Urmila’s slumber and Draupadi’s humiliation and scrutinize the silences and gaps in the original renditions. These gaps have been strategically and creatively filled by writers and new versions and interpretations arise to counter much subjugation meted out to these characters in the name of custom. These fresh renditions show how grand narratives which have been celebrated for very long time have an undercurrent of sexism and how writers by foregrounding the ideological marginalization of female characters try to question this either by foregrounding these women characters and placing them at the centre or by changing the narrative of the story and assigning new roles to the women characters. This is eventually considered as an act of contestation and emancipation for the women characters.
The fourth chapter, “Rewriting Caste: Sumitra, Shambhuka, Karna, Eklavya” is central to the rewritings which have given voice to the characters which are marginalized in terms of caste. The character of Sumitra and Shambhuk from the Ramayana and Karna and Ekalavya from the Mahabharata are chosen to look into the caste construction of the epic and see how rewritings have combated this segregation. Along with these major characters few minor characters (Souvali, Yuyutsu) and their versions of story are also explored. Initially the chapter argues how in the garb of glorification of ‘Ramrajya’ Sumitra’s story and plight went unnoticed by writers. Two texts (Sita’s Sister and Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana) are chosen to look into her marginalization and put forth the issue of caste discrimination. Though both the texts do not have Sumitra as the central character but both of them have foregrounded her victimization and made a critique of much glorified ‘Ramrajya’. The same is the case with Shambhuka. Popularly absent (except in discourses that counter marginalization and casteism) his character is also a medium to criticize the notion of a utopian place called ‘Ramrajya’. These characters highlight the alternative perspectives and new insights to the concept of the ‘Ramrajya’. On the other hand, Karna and Ekalavya from the Mahabharata are two characters who are victimized for belonging to the ‘lower caste’. Rewritings have provided them an opportunity to counter their ‘victimization’. Their version of the story discloses many unsung incidents and presents their victimization to counter the culture of caste discrimination. Many contemporary issues like caste-discrimination, academic favoritism as well as monopoly and dictatorship of the state are the key concepts writers have explored
through these subjugated characters. The politics of caste has been traced in the
mythological grounding through these rewritings and its contemporary existence
has been exposed through them.

These rewritings are thus an attempt at liberating characters that were long
suppressed in the name of glorification of two major grand narratives of Indian
tradition by giving them a voice. Rewritings, in a way, help in the democratization
of the mainstream tradition of the rendition of the epics and act as a resistance to
the hegemony making it a deliberate political attempt on the writer’s part. Thus the
chapter has tried to establish that rewritings are radical writings that are used to
dismantle the existing suppressing hegemonies and status quo 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 make audible the suppressed voices and
works as a resistance against the tyranny. Epics, through rewritings have thus tried
to do justice to suppressed voices and worked as a resistance against the hierarchal
social structure. The thesis also establishes the fact that rewritings are political
attempts to see how canonical texts like the revered epics have many commitments
apart from the literary ones and cannot be taken as naïve pieces of work.

The objective of the thesis (to explore the ways contemporary rewritings
have given voice to those characters that are shown marginalized, silent and
subjugated in two major Indian grand narratives- the Ramayana and the
Mahabharata) has been attained and it has also been analyzed how rewritings in
their own way have countered against the stereotyped presentation of certain characters. Rewritings, by adopting various strategies like shifting the master-centre of the narrative, replacing the central character with the marginalized character, exposing the absences and silences of the mainstream renditions etc bring to the light many issues and subtexts which are not explicit in the mainstream renditions. Moreover, it has also brought to light how these select contemporary rewritings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have foregrounded the victimization of select characters by shifting the master centers and giving voice to the marginalized characters. They have made a critique of the revered epic tradition in India by looking at the alternative perspectives and approaches through which these epics are rendered. The mythological stories gain power with the retelling, and these writings with fresh perspectives make it anew. Through the medium of rewriting, mythological classics and old epics get a new version. This in a way makes the epic a part of the living tradition. It, in a way, thus tries to look for contemporariness of the epics and tries to figure out or identify countless issues and problems existing around in contemporary world and show how those problems have remnants in our mythical past. Rewritings, thus, explore the role of defining the present through the past.

On the basis of the outcome and findings of the thesis, it can be concluded that contemporary rewritings of the epics are radical and challenging against the notion of reverence for the epics. As it has been explained how epics which hold a pinnacle status in society, there exists a restlessness underlying the glorious
presentation and lives of chief characters. The gaps and silences in the mainstream rendition of epics get explored by many writers and these explorations are based on many ideological commitments. These new stories and interpretations sprouted out of the mainstream rendition are a result of shift in popular discourse and resistive in nature. The thesis has also shown that though this resistance towards the discrimination in terms of caste and gender in the epics is more frequent in contemporary rewritings, this trend has been old and can be traced back to Chandrabati’s *Sitayana* and many other writings. So, it can be concluded that though the emergence of critical theories is a recent trend, the resistance towards narrative hegemony is an age old practice.

The thesis has tried to argue that contemporary rewritings of the epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* – give voice to those characters who are marginalized and silenced. Sprung from the political and social margins, it acts as an answer to canonical literature’s assertions of authenticity and originality. Rewriting a text from a new perspective, this dominant ideology is contested and challenged exposing the subjugating elements of that text and thwarting the dominant ideology by shifting the master-center of mainstream rendition to another character whose perspective might affect, change or challenge the ideology of the source text. The basis of such marginalization and silencing has largely been gender and caste. In contemporary times when these two coordinates have not lost their power of segregating people rewritings of these canonical texts and tradition become all the more relevant. The thesis has tried to study how these marginalized
and silenced voices are given counter textual spaces by contemporary rewritings for positing alternative voices of resistance and protest. Rewritings of both the epics, the thesis has argued, are major interventions in the narrative tradition of India in the sense that they interrogate, dismantle and subvert the various hegemonic voices of the mainstream renditions of the epics that are much revered by people of the country.