

The Impact of Mythological and Religious Representation of Disability on Contemporary Literature

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This paper is an attempt to review some literary works of the contemporary times: *Andha Yug* by Dharamvir Bharti [1955] and *The Great Indian Novel* by Shashi Tharoor [1989] and various other texts like *Rashmirathi* by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar [1952] and *Komal Gandhar* by the Hindi playwright Shankar Shesh [1978], to bring into focus that how these works have contributed in furtherance of already established mythologically constructed beliefs about the visually disabled in Indian society and to point out how both the authors of the works have used Mahabharata to demonstrate chaos, destruction and the failure of the ruling class followed by various other texts reflecting a similar discourse. The former has used it to show chaos and destruction due to the holocaust as an aftermath of the partition and the latter has used it to reveal the failure of Indian politicians who were participatory in the ruling class of the time. Significantly, this chapter would also be an effort to look at the status of visually challenged people in contemporary Indian society and to bring into light that how they are treated, and the manner in which mythologically constructed myths have been affecting their surroundings. *Komal Gandhar* is another drama which is a thought provoking presentation of Hindi Classical Drama which represents glimpses from the epic Mahabharata, focusing on some issues such as misuse of power. Whereas, *Rashmirathi* is another work which is quite popular in the literary world. It again represents episodes from the Mahabharata and highlights the life story of the warrior Karna and the villainous passions of Duryodhana followed by Dhritarashtra's failure as a king. The chapter will end with a comparative reference to some works of the blind English poet John Milton.

Andha Yug focuses on an important phase of Modern Indian history that is partition. As Jaidev Taneja points out, the play has used the term "Andhayuga" six times and words like "Andha", "Andhapan" and "Andhata" etc. have been used fifty-six times.¹ In his play, Bharati has described the age of chaos as a "blind age" (andha yuga), while it could have also been referred to as "Dark Age" (andhakar yuga). This choice denotes that each and every immoral activity of living beings is designated as a symbol of blindness.

¹ *Andha Yug Paath Aur Pradarshan* (Hindi) Jaidev Taneja 1998

The sudden death of Pandu, the king of the Bharata empire, Hastinapur, brought a question as to who would become the new king. Pandu's elder brother, Dhritarashtra could not occupy the throne as he was born blind. It was a conflict where it was difficult to decide who would possess the kingdom knowing that both Pandu and Dhritarashtra had sons with ambitions to rule. Dhritarashtra literally "turns a blind eye" when his firstborn Duryodhana refuses to share the kingdom amongst his cousins and become a king. In the end, a fratricidal war breaks out with vast armies joining on each side through the realm. The protagonists of the play are portrayed as complicated characters from the epic: like Gandhari, the Kauravas' mother, who deliberately shuts her vision by blindfolding herself in order to show devotion towards her blind husband; her husband Dhritarashtra, who could not only not see, but often refuses to see the truth as well; Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra's chariot driver who was gifted with an extraordinary vision, and who describes the cruelty of the battle to Dhritarashtra; Dhritarashtra's illegitimate son, Yuyutsu, born to a mother who was a slave, who fights with Pandavas against the Kauravas, and is criticised and punished when he returns home for not supporting in his brothers' wrongdoings; and finally, Ashwatthama who is constantly confused between Pandavas and Kauravas, often driving himself into an unending pain.

The play highlights the ending of the battle. Kurukshetra is covered with vultures and corpses, the city is burning, and there are ruins everywhere. Few Kauravas who manage to survive the battle are mourning for their dead brothers. They dream of one last chance to take revenge. They do not listen to Ashwathama, and he finally releases the Brahmastra, a weapon to destroy the world. However, they see Krishna as the reason behind the war, and curse him. The real moral factor lies in Krishna. He is compassionate, does good deeds, and despite failing to bring peace, his acts reveal that ethics can always help a man even in the worst of times.

Andha Yug is considered to be one of the most prominent plays in Modern Indian Literature. The author writes it immediately after India's independence. The play reflects a concrete juxtaposition of politics and hostile selfhood. The absence of morality is revealed when violence takes its form and lets a society down. Andha Yug notes the conflict between the self-glory that Kauravas represent, and the need to find a way of redemption instead of plotting revenge. One of the most popular plays of Post-Independence, Andha Yug points out various moral questions on the subject of atrocities of the partition.

The play captures the action of the last day of war, and centres around some baffled Kaurava survivors. The character of Krishna remains central, and he possesses many ways to bring goodness in the world. He believes in truth and justice. The Kauravas ignore this revelation and good qualities of Krishna, and this failure leads to their devastation.

Partition occurs due to the failure of the ruling class. That's why the characters of Dhritarashtra and Gandhari play a very significant role in the play. As discussed in the second chapter, Dhritarashtra's real blindness and Gandhari's wilful blindness not only symbolize loss of eyesight in the physical sense but also are seen to allude to emotional and moral blindness. In this sequence, Dharamvir Bharati uses these characters to show the chaos of the partition period, people of the immoral ruling class, who were responsible for the whole event.

Gandhari's blindness is also a part of the discourse as she stands as the shadow of Dhritarashtra throughout his life. She accepts voluntary blindness after her marriage. Even if she has made a huge sacrifice, like Dhritarashtra she too suffers from narrow mindedness and vain glory. Just like her husband, who is totally blind towards Duryodhana, Gandhari feels that Pandavas have always chosen the path of immorality, and Krishna constantly supports them in their bad deeds and she thinks that the Kauravas have the legitimate right to own the kingdom. In the beginning of this play, Gandhari is seen mourning for the death of her sons. She feels dejected by the functioning of the world because she feels extremely disappointed at the loss of morality in the battle. She believes that virtues like 'Dharma', duty and honour are considered insignificant and they are unreal and illusions. They do not hold any significance or they are too easy to be broken down. She considers wisdom and honour as useless things. She realises the animality in the human nature when she experiences the shock of her sons' death: "There is a dark abyss in each of us where a ferocious beast – a blind beast who is the master of all we know and do." (AY37) The narrative suggests that blindness is associated with immorality and animality. Gandhari, being blind, could always sense the blindness of others indulged with huge amount of self-interest. She is always aware of the hidden and destructive aspects of the war and describes its ugly face and the selfish mentality hidden behind it.

The emphasis of the play lies on the meaning of Karuna (compassion), failure of moral responsibility during the acts of violation, the importance of grief, the politics of Revenge and the responsibility of Gods to prevent the decay of humankind. The idea behind this principle is simple as it suggests that a time comes when human beings are unable to avoid annihilation on the account of greed and violence and at that time a sacred force has to appear in order to save the world and the humankind. As we know that 'Andha Yug' was written right after the Partition of India which reflects the aftermath of Mahabharata war where the same situation prevailed which is why Bharati chooses this as the theme of the play. The kingdom of Hastinapur seemed to have descended into dark ages after the momentous war. As world history suggests, war always created more war and it is never the means to solve problems or bring peace. Surely, the perpetrators of immorality and evil like Duryodhana and Karna were punished but even to the Pandavas, who were the victors, the sense of achievement was temporary.

The play provides its audience with a slice of the epic drama which is full of self-centredness, hatred, sacrifices, fraud, treacheries, diseases, unending darkness, blindness, massacres and disbelief. Apart from narrating the story of the on-field violence, it also narrates a huge saga of the abyssal darkness residing inside a human mind. It is an individual's inner darkness which makes one blind spiritually and mentally in spite of physical sight and everyone in this epic carries this darkness inside themselves. It successfully presents the inner darkness with all its shades and its subtle scission towards ultimate decadence and the discourse in such cases functions through the subtleties of the mind as well where everyone seems to carry the baggage of self-centredness and a will to dominate.

"Blind fear, blind love, blind power and blind justice shall prevail in the end." (Andha Yug 27) Blindness inside the human beings and the darkness in the outside world are two things which would prevail throughout and the condition of the present times would be horrible in every manner and the life of any individual in these conditions is nothing but absurd and meaningless. Moreover, the city is ruled by a king who is blind from birth and his wife and confidante Gandhari, also chooses voluntary blindness and the king is unable to guess the dangers of any wrongdoings. As we have learnt that the king, "Had he ever been able to see anything thus far" (Andha Yug 31), he would not have been narrow minded, and there could have been some possibility of hope and goodness.

As we witness that the Pandavas are the first victims of the discourse of darkness and the Kauravas have obviously fallen a prey to it. They seem to be suffering from different kinds of iniquities right from their births and we also know that their father, king Dhritarashtra, is also blind since birth. As a king of the empire, he wishes his sons to rule the kingdom and denies the share of power to the Pandavas. He is blindly in love with his sons that in a way he becomes the chief cause of the Great War and we witness that he is more emotionally and reasonably blind rather than physically blind. He has kept himself totally unaware of the reality. Even after seventeen days of the war, he still strongly believes that the Kauravas would win it. He survives and creates his opinions on the basis of his borrowed knowledge from Vidura and Sanjaya and we see that throughout the epic, he is unable to build his own world of perception which is because of the darkness filled in his vision. Unfortunately, Dhritarashtra never manages to understand the outside reality and constantly desires to establish his son Duryodhana as the absolute ruler of Hastinapur. "I had spun an illusory world of dreams and desires and passions out of the depth of that darkness" (Andha Yug p.33). Dhritarashtra much later manages to realise that he was unable to assess the Pandavas and Lord Krishna, and that he always neglected his son's follies and made some impractical and biased decisions.

He is portrayed as the visionless king who lives in an illusory world and is extremely narrow minded. The guards of the king's palace speak the truth about the king's actual condition where they refer to his inability to see literally and metaphorically as he is physically blinded and also very narrow-minded which depicts his mental blindness as well. He could not perceive any falsities done by his sons who define everything for him and his sheer blind love towards them, especially Duryodhana, makes him totally blind towards his duties as a king.

He does not sense his position as per the law or code of honour but feels it out of his extreme emotional abilities, and because he could never think rationally, he loses all his sons in the end. He crumbles down before the fear related to the future once he realises that his desires and dreams are nothing but fallacies. We witness that Dhritarashtra faces complexities during the discourse formation. On one hand, he initiates a discourse, on the other hand, he becomes the victim of that discourse himself. His mental blindness fails to imagine the horrors of the war when he puts his blind faith in Duryodhana, showing petty intentions to give power in Duryodhana's hand and denying the Pandavas their legal rights.

Even if he has fear inside him, he does not seem to learn anything from his past events. Dhritarashtra is still hugely occupied with the thought of power even after experiencing the great carnage. His thirst for power is witnessed in the final stage when he expects Yudhishtira to quit the throne and the Kaurava son, Yuyutsu gets the kingship. Dhritarashtra's death carries a symbolic meaning. He dies while burning in the forest which suggests a kind of purification that can be seen as gaining life through death. His discourse of life which prevails in darkness suggests the unrighteous manner in which rulers behave and provides an indication of how the desires and interests of the rulers dominate the common welfare and interest. However, the entire realm of the discourse is woven around Dhritarashtra and his darkness.

In a nutshell, Dharamvir Bharati has made an attempt to define whole period as a blind age and the people who participated either from the ruling class or civilian society as "immoral", and he therefore calls them blind as Dhritarashtra and Gandhari who were or chose the physical disability have been associated with foolishness, numbness and immorality. As we see in Act 1 of the play, Dhritarashtra says, "I could not understand their pain, I could not understand the cheer-haran of Draupadi because I have not seen the world." Here it demonises visual disability, in which a person who cannot see is also a person who has no feelings and instincts, which is why the author chooses to use words like, Andha, Andhapan many times and calls the whole Yuga blind. Thus, in Dharamvir Bharati's play we find continuation of prevalent myth about visual disability in the Mahabharata.

Komal Gandhar, by the Hindi playwright Shankar Shesh, is another play which is a thought provoking presentation of Hindi Classical Drama. It represents a glimpse from the Mahabharata which focuses on serious issues like women's empowerment, and misusing power and politics in order to satisfy one's own ego. It is illustrated from the various events in the Mahabharata that state the viewpoints through the perspective of the Pandavas and the Kauravas that include envy, revenge, and the immense struggle for love and power.

The play opens with introducing the new princess and bride Gandhari, who is dreaming about her meeting with the handsome prince, Dhritarashtra. Gandhari's dreams get shattered after knowing about her marriage with the blind king. She feels cheated by her parents seeking to have better gains, but she decides to transform her rage by taking a revenge, and blindfolding

herself throughout her life. Therefore, the play progresses by showcasing some unethical episodes which reflect contemporary life as well.

The Dwapar Yuga comes to an end after Mahabharata and the world begins in the form of Kaliyuga. In the play, Gandhari is a woman who completely changes the whole scenario of the Kuruvansh clan that is known as an exemplary dynasty of its time and she is a woman in a male dominated society. Gandhari who is married to Dhritarashtra blindfolds her eyes, which was perceived as maintaining equality with her blind husband. However the play indicates that the truth does not lie on the surface. In fact there is so much depth in every question like why did Shakuni intervene in his sister's life and play a major role in ruining Hastinapur, or how did Duryodhana become villainous, or why Bhishma Pitamaha determines to get the blind king Dhritarashtra married, and how Gandhari changes ultimately, taking revenge and probably inducing the great war of Mahabharata.

Gandhari being a very strong, assertive and articulate character, does not seem to be a passive victim. She chooses to defy the patriarchal interpretation of her voluntary blindness which is represented as an act of obedience to her husband's visionless world. The whole act is marked as the way of protest, anger and bitterness in order to negate her right to swayamvara and being married off to a blind man. However, she is always pulled back into the same patriarchal discourse, despite her relentless effort to leave it behind, and this representation of Gandhari's character reveals the real position of women in society.

Gandhari, showing the deep darkness of revenge in her heart happened to speak against it but somehow falls prey to the discourse of darkness herself. She is so involved in her own consciousness that she becomes completely oblivious about the reality around her. Even after the seventeen days of war, she still carries unrealistic hope for her son's victory. When Duryodhana gets fatal injuries at the end of the battle with Bhima and is lying on his deathbed, Gandhari does not choose to meet him. This suggests that it is not easy for her to face realities, and seeing her loving son dying.

She chooses to live in her own created world which is full of noise and air. Her self-imposed blindness signifies the confinement of her vision as well as thought. She is often seen exhibiting the influence of the ideological formations which disables her to think realistically. Due to blindness and uncontrollable rage after the Kauravas' defeat, she curses Krishna even

when it was unjust which says that she herself suffered with a curse of darkness throughout her life. Being a victim of the discourse to dominate and pursue self-interest, Gandhari too leads the path of injustice. Her voluntary blindness indicates her will to participate in the discourse of darkness. Her thought process is full of contradictions as she is rationally aware about the destruction that the war would bring, but emotionally she refuses to acknowledge it and learn anything from it, and therefore, she continues to support Duryodhana's animality.

As we see, Gandhari describes the most ugly face of the repercussions of the war and the selfish motive of everyone behind it, because being blind herself, she could sense the blindness of others which was created out of their self-interests, although whenever Duryodhana would ask his mother for her blessing for success in the war, Gandhari would say "may victory find the side of righteousness". The play highlights the Kauravas' downfall, as in the original Mahabharata, but presenting it from a different perspective. Gandhari undoubtedly has made a great sacrifice in her life by choosing voluntary blindness but she also has a narrow mind and suffers from vain glory just like her husband. Gandhari, just like her husband, is blind towards Duryodhana's unjust acts. As she mourns for her sons' deaths, she feels dejected by humanity, and the values that are distorted during the battle. Dharma and Honour are mere illusions for her as they do not hold any substance and are too fragile to be broken down. Experiencing the shock of her sons' death she believes wisdom and duty as useless virtues and, she subtly becomes aware of the animality in human nature.

Komal Gandhar reflects the significant episode of the epic when Bhishma, who was the mentor of the entire Mahabharata and never wished to see the end of the Hastinapur, wishes Dhritarashtra's legal heir to manage the kingdom, and continue the lineage despite knowing that the Pandavas were more worthy and eligible than the Kauravas to run the kingdom. He seeks the Gandhar king's daughter Gandhari as the bride for Dhritrashtra. Gandhari is never told about her husband's disability, and having a utopian image of her prince with a strong chest, well built and enchanting eyes, she is married off and starts her marital journey to Hastinapur. As she reaches Hastinapur she witnesses that her utopian image is untrue and she is married to a blind man. The play moves forward presenting how Gandhari takes up an oath and she pretends to be a blind woman. She accepts voluntary blindness to seek revenge while her brother Shakuni also gets involved by seeing this as an opportunity to destroy Hastinapur. The play further signifies how Duryodhan gets into gambling and how his death forms the rest of the story. Therefore the narrative suggests that blind people are not considered suitable

for marriage and not wanted by society, and disabled people like Shakuni are considered malicious as we witness in both the Mahabharata and in Komal Gandhar. We also learn how blindness gets easily associated with darkness and immorality.

Rashmirathi is a modern epic by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar which is quite phenomenal in the world of Hindi poetry. It represents the episodes from the Mahabharata where Kunti gives birth to her first son Karna. She is given a mantra by a Rishi who tells her that she would conceive a baby and the Sun would be his father, and Kunti being naïve and curious recites the Mantra, conceives Karna and gives birth to him. Kunti was unmarried when she gave birth to Karna and hence, she couldn't keep the baby. She decides to put Karna in a basket and leaves him to flow in the river. A charioteer's wife finds the baby in the basket, brings him home and make him a part of her poor, low class family. Karna grows up to be a highly skilled warrior whose abilities were known to be completely unmatched. He gets massively insulted for his low birth when he challenged the warrior prince and a Pandava, Arjuna, for a duel. Duryodhana notices how Karna gets insulted in spite of his strength only because he didnot belong to a royal family. Duryodhana defends him and crowns him as the king of a kingdom and thus, makes him a part of royalty. Karna feels deeply indebted to Duryodhana, forming a close companionship with him, and decides to fight with him against the Pandavas, even though he was their half-brother. The poem narrates episodes from Karna's tragic life and how destiny has always acted against him, in spite of his valour, strength and generosity.

Karna was obliged to fight from the Kauravas' side as Duryodhana recognised his merits despite his lower strata and made him a king because Karna was one of the known fighters of the time. However, Karna's siding with the Kauravas was a huge worry for the Pandavas because he was known to be unconquerable in war. Kunti, on the eve of Mahabharata war, goes to Karna and requests him to end the war by leaving the Kauravas' side and helping his half-brothers, the Pandavas, as it was appropriate because he was her first born. To his mother's request, Karna replies that even if he foresees a defeat for Kauravas, he still would fight from the Kauravas' side and he believes that the war is pointless and hence, it is a destiny that has to be fulfilled.

After returning from 15 years of exile in the forests and in the incognito mode, the Panadavas expected to get back their kingdom but Duryodhana refused to oblige and compensate any share with them. Lord Krishna acts like a mediator and tries to convince Duryodhana to value the reason and give Panadavas at least five villages where they could reside peacefully.

Duryodhana's refusal ultimately becomes the reason for the war, and Lord Krishna also announces the inevitability of a war where Duryodhana would not seek victory. Lord Krishna, despite his good and genuine intent, fails to convince Duryodhana to avoid war as Duryodhana refuses to give any share of power to the Pandavas which led to the declaration of war. To win though, he meets and invites Karna to his chariot as he was the greatest warrior Duryodhana could have and without him it would have been difficult to survive in the war.

Krishna also tries another way to avoid the war by convincing Karna to leave the Kauravas' side and fight with Pandavas. Kunti had abandoned Karna right after his birth because she was unmarried at that time and she could not afford to suffer the ignominy of being an unmarried mother of a child. Karna grows in a low caste family but his great warrior skills are recognised by Duryodhana and adopts him as a close friend despite knowing his lowly origin. Karna, being a legendary philanthropist, did not care about wealth and status but deeply valued his friendship with Duryodhana which is why when Krishna tries to convince him, he refuses to give up even though he was a half-brother of the Pandavas. Therefore, the poet conveys that through Rashmirathi he seeks opportunities to introduce his own opinion about the society and times, as the poem depicts the immorality of the Kauravas residing in the clan. Duryodhan, being nurtured by a blind father and mother could never lead the path of morality and justice. On the other hand, Dhritarashtra also fails as a ruler and as a father. The physically disabled maternal uncle Shakuni's immorality and the father's blindness aggravated the villainous passions of Duryodhana, and it ultimately establishes the same myth about disability where we find Dhritarashtra being completely miserable, unable to control situations and the war becomes inevitable for everyone.

The Great Indian Novel derives its sources from the Mahabharata. Hence, in this perspective it becomes important to critically review this novel. We know that the novel was written in 1989 when the disability movement was very strong throughout the world.

Shashi Tharoor's narrator comments that the old is new again, and The Great Indian Novel reflects this point, considering its totality in the theme. But what does not appear as new in the novel is the representation of visual disability's mythological projection. The novel becomes a palimpsest that reflects this sub-text clearly. The author also acknowledges the title of the novel underlining and giving a key to the work in a preliminary disclaimer.

The title of the novel is not an estimate of its contents by the author; it comes out to be an inspiration and acknowledgement to the epic Mahabharata. In Sanskrit Maha denotes great and Bharata denotes India. Hence, the epic is a great narration of the Indian race, and about the ancestors of current Indians. The current title's last word needs a brief explanation. If the text could be read as a polymorphous genre of fiction, it is "novel" that offers newness, and one may wish to do an addition of some contemporary material, writing about the current India told in allegorical connection to ancient literature. The explicitness in the text is around Indian history since the rise of the national movement under British colonisation to the times of the nation after Indira Gandhi's assassination, that is contemporary Indian history in the last century. Therefore, it is a new vision of India, keeping in mind colonial, post-colonial and modern eras, that appear in the mind of the reader when the former one is explained with a hindsight.

In the opening chapter, entitled as "The Twice-Born Tale", the narrator claims his true motive by transcribing 'The Song of Modern India' in his own words. An old politician Ved Vyas (V.V.), narrates the entire story to a young scribe, Ganapathy, recommended by a friend with similar conditions that Vyasa imposed on Ganesh in the initial part of the ancient epic. This event is itself as a first instance frames the entire novel. Like The Mahabharata, the novel is divided into eighteen books that are further sub-divided into one hundred and twenty three sections. The writing style is formal prose, the narrative at times gets switched to verse, for instance, during the part when Bhagavad Gita is discussed.

Apart from the formal similarity with the ancient text, Ved Vyas's narrative follows the plotline and other important episodes very precisely. Just like the original, the initial ten books lead to the war between the Kauravas and Pandavas., while it is juxtaposed with the struggle for independence, and the culmination of the rivalry between the Hindu politicians after the country gets independent through democratic functions. The last eight books mark the consequences of the power struggle that led to the ultimate No-Win, an inappropriate

situation for the nation, a situation that is similar to India in the 1980s as suggested by the narrator while he ends the story. The eighteenth book reveals the protagonists of History who achieved fame under the authority of Yudhishtir, just as seen in the epic.

When one experiences the unwinding of the story with close details, it becomes evident that faithfulness is achieved through various devices initiating from modernisation of the epic, like Ved Vyas's own story about his family (when a Brahmin sage compared to Ganga seduces a fisherman's daughter), or when the crucial battle of Mahabharata and the Gita are transformed into the power struggle between Indira Gandhi's political party, Congress, and Hindu Janata Front, a moral, traditional political party. Transformations like these create parody and highlight the epic characters of the novel in a mocking manner, as the identification of every historical figure is done with a mythic counterpart. It is done in a significant manner with the narrator's and the author's comment on a specific person in relation to his or her mythical identification that has been played in the historical India.

Hence, the role of Gandhi is identified with Bhishma, the only son of Goddess Ganga and Santanu who survived and renounces the kingdom of Hastinapur before time so that his father's second marriage could be allowed. He also renounces sexual pleasures to make sure his half younger brother's succession. He is seen as wise and charismatic, also known as Mahaguru (great teacher), takes responsibility of his half brother Dhritarashtra, the blind king, who is represented here as Jawaharlal Nehru, who is also known for his wisdom and knowledge, however isolated from realities and is too blinded to understand the truth. Hence, blindness has not been taken by Tharoor as just loss of eye-sight but it symbolizes darkness of mind as it is represented in the Mahabharata which is the original source of this novel.

Pandu (Subhash Chandra Bose) is seen as a passionate, pragmatic and a kind figure. The trio implicates the Kaurava dynasty (and in the modern times it is the Indian National Congress), which is the legal heir to the kingdom of Hastinapur, which then symbolizes the whole India. Bhishma arranges marriages for his half younger brothers. Dhritarashtra's blindness is reminded to readers again and again though Dhritarashtra married a beautiful princess. But for Gangaji due to Dhritarashtra's blindness this mattered least. This is another myth about visually disabled people that they cannot admire external beauty of the person. "For you, Dhritarashtra, the eldest, I have found a girl from a very good family of Allahabad. She is called Gandhari, and I am told she has lustrous black eyes. Not," he added hastily, "that

matters, of course. No, the main attraction of this lovely lady, from our point of view, is that she hails from a most productive line.” (43)

The rivalry between the cousins to attain the power over Hastinpur led to the rise of the war. Pandu's five sons, Yudhishtir, Bheem, Arjun, and the twins Nakul and Sahdev, are associated with Morarji Desai, the Army, the Press, the Administration, and the Foreign Offices respectively. Pandu is never aware about Kunti's illegitimate son, Karna, who disappeared and re-emerges as a Gold Boy with mark of a crescent moon on his forehead, and he is equated with Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Dhritarashtra, has one hundred sons known as Kauravas from his wife Gandhari. His counterpart Nehru is the leader of the Indian Nation Congress. Dhritarashtra also has a daughter, who is the namesake of Duryodhana, and is the eldest of the hundred sons. During her birth, she is greeted with omens that foretell destruction of the country. In other words, she can be seen as the immoral daughter of the immoral father who is morally blind as well.

The Great Indian Novel is easily understood by those who have knowledge about the episodes from the epic, and also are well aware about recent Indian history. It is interpreted that the plot Tharoor uses is extremely straightforward and lacks sophistication. The narration is seen to be very elaborative. The novel not only has to integrate the sheer rivalry for power, but also take account of the Indian political parties and factions through the perspective of the epic, and also to widely discuss the freedom struggle of India from its colonial master, without which the political struggle would not have been possible. Therefore, the story being borrowed from Mahabharata would not have made Ved Vyas's story telling possible.

The foreign characters in the novel are handled through multicultural sources, in the weft of the Indian mythologies, Tharoor adds colonial and post-colonial narratives that are depicted in the first ten books. These depictions, however, are more distorted than a clear presentation of the Indian epic and Indian historical episodes. But the fact of the matter is that Shashi Tharoor follows the same tradition of Mahabharata about visual disability by continuing the same myth constructed by Ved Vyasa. That is, Dhritarashtra's moral emotional blindness with few delineations. It is explicit in the novel that Dhritarashtra [Nehru], now and then takes many of the decisions just because of his daughter Indira Gandhi [Priya Duryodhani] as Dhritarashtra has followed his son's wish in the Mahabharata. But there is a significant distinction between Tharoor's novel and Mahabharata that is, in Tharoor's novel

Dhritarashtra [Nehru] inherits the throne while in Mahabharata he never gets his throne and rules as a caretaker. But he projects him as a failed ruler.

Tharoor has depicted Dhritarashtra [Nehru] as completely emotionally blind. When his wife Gandhari dies he is least bothered about her death. It has been represented in the novel that Gandhari blind-folds her eyes like in original Mahabharata for Dhritarashtra [Nehru], but he is least bothered about her. He never writes letters to her or never cares for her. On her death bed also she waits for Dhritarashtra. She dies in the process but he is least bothered about her death. When he is reminded by his daughter that “mother is dead she was waiting for you” Hesays, “it doesn’t matter.” (217) It is an exaggerated representation of the marital relation of Kamala Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru. Here Tharoor projects popular belief of Indian society that the visually disabled are emotionally blind too. It is a very popular phrase in Hindi language ‘Andhe Ke Aage Rona Bekar Hai’, that is crying before a blind person is meaningless. In a broader sense, it means that blind people are emotionless. Tharoor incorporates in this novel this belief very well while representing Gandhari’s death.

The subsequent ‘Midnight’s Parents’, represents the most debated relationship between Edwina Moutbatten (Lady Georgina Drewpad) and Nehru (Dhritarashtra) being the secret parents of Draupadi Mokراسي (D.Mokراسي, or ‘democracy’; we will encounter the allegory later). The caricature of democracy has been represented by Tharoor by showing democracy as a child of an illegitimate relationship between the blind king Dhritarashtra [Nehru] and Lady Georgina. Here again Tharoor degrades Dhritarashtra [Nehru] by projecting Nehru’s immoral action in him. Jacques Derrida shows how blind people have been represented in literature as lecherous. In this fashion, Tharoor makes Nehru as a lecherous character.

The ironical mix of the historical facts and literary illusions, in addition with the philosophical comments by the narrator who is explicitly representing the author’s own voice and judgment, is the method used by Tharoor in the entire novel. Other literary figures of style like allegory, satire or caricature are also depicted. Two allegories that dominate the novel’s style, and are also instrumental to the story, are of Dharma and Democracy that again depict the multicultural approach in the novel asserting its Indian-ness. Draupadi represents Democracy. She is a mythical heroine who is married to the five Pandavas. Yudhishtira depicting the Judiciary, Bhim the nation’s army, Arjun the media and the press, the twins diplomatic and civil services. Draupadi being a secret daughter of the blind Dhritarashtra and

Lady Drewpad, her name represents both Eastern and Western heritage. In order to make things more clear, Tharoor provides Draupadi an adoptive father Mr. Mokراسي, also enabling her tutor Professor Jennings who reports her progress as a growing girl in the story.

Dharma, a complex Indian concept, is allegorised as an irregular idea in the novel. However, it comes to its form in the last book 'The Path to Salvation', where everyone gets what they deserve. Yudhishtir, who is perplexed and wonders about the justice in the eyes of Dharma, seeing it as a beautiful woman. It is that Indian principle that has been practiced since ages, and it carries enormous significance, conveying the idea that without Dharma, life is worthless. For the first time, Yudhishtir who always followed Dharma in his life, was granted the path of Paradise but he rejects it ("India is eternal [...] but the dharma appropriate for it at different stages of its evolution has varied. Thus showing the necessity to shake of the shackles of constraining tradition, he sees to his astonishment that the resplendent deva beside him was changing slowly back into a dog.")

The disrespect of 'Dharma' by the author is not to allegorize ideas or concepts, as it should be evident by now. His representation of the historical figures with their mythical counterparts, is mostly depicted through caricatures. Whereas, providing the constant hagiography to the figures has also been precisely done. However, in Priya Duryodhani's (Indira Gandhi) case, the representation is done with bitter criticism.

She was a slight, frail girl [...] with a long thin tapering face like the kernel of a mango and dark eyebrows that nearly joined together over her high-ridged nose, giving her the look of a desiccated school teacher at an age when she was barely old enough to enroll at school. Her eyes shone from that pinched face like blazing gems on a fading backcloth, flashing, questioning, accusing, demanding in a manner that transcended mere words.[...] Even at the age of twelve, overkill was already her problem. [...] Priya Duryodhani stepped into my room wearing an elegant shawl and an inelegant scowl [...], my desiccated grand daughter's schemes had misfired. Duryodhani's thin lips bared a chilling smile of contentment. (207)

When one recollects the emblematic image of 'Mother India', Priya Duryodhani is deprived of all female attributes that makes her an unnatural demonic figure. Again it shows the failure of Nehru [Dhritarashtra] in controlling his daughter as a father which symbolizes his incapability as a king or father because of his blindness.

While Tharoor has expressed an unprecedented openness, he states the assurance of how the Gandhi Nehru era has gone and how individual weakness and social evils are exposed bluntly. Through the novel, Tharoor reminds us of the mean minded characters like Duryodhani who devastates situations with her ambition and dark ego. He mentions some dishonest characters like Shakuni and thus, in the tradition of epic and oral narrative, the author highlights the history as well as the fiction. Looking at the historical India, it suggests that like ancient Hastinapur, it also contained 'Midnight's Parents' like Dhritarashtra, Vidur, Karna and Pandu, and villainous advisors like Shakuni who advised the arrogant and self seeking politicians like Priya Duryodhani, consumed with the greed for power brought some profound misery and suffering to the nation. This is how the novel makes use of creativity to interpret contemporary history in relation to the role of contemporary political personalities.

Shakuni Shankar Dey (Siddharta Shakar Ray, former West Bengal Chief Minister and a legal advisor to Indira Gandhi), who depicts Shakuni, gives suggestion to Priya Duryodhani at a very crucial juncture to impose Internal Emergency Under Article 352 and it is important to note that Shakuni is physically challenged in Mahabharata and his role was also crucial in bringing out the war. To this the celebrated journalist, Kuldeep Nayar explains:

Under emergency powers, the centre could give any direction to any state, suspend Article ninetieth of the constitutions or suspend the whole range of fundamental rights. Courts could be ordered not to entertain any suit seeking to enforce these rights and so on. Powers would be sweeping (35)

The Emergency Period was considered one of the blackest periods in the entire history of Indian Democracy. It debauched the freedom of the press and limited the civil liberties of the people. The powers as Prime Minister were transgressed by Priya Duryodhani during this Emergency Period and she violates the democratic principles enormously which led to also affecting the constitutional rights of the people. Tharoor, therefore, related this misuse of power with the episode of Draupadi's (i.e. Democracy's) molestation in the mythology which signifies the devastation of the freedom and dignity of the Indians

The physical caricatures imply more or less the psychological and moral distortions of the individuals, however, the novel is more focused to discuss the extended political and social satire of the Indian society during the colonial and post-colonial era. This seems to be the entire gist of the text. On the one hand, Tharoor makes his satire more effective by using a visually disabled character to represent the ruling class's failure that continues the already established prejudice, which fulfils the novel's purpose here. On the other hand, however, it becomes unbearable for disabled characters being projected in this manner in the 20th century. It is degrading and mocking for the whole community. It should be remembered by this time that the disabled community started recognizing themselves as a class or minority group. So Tharoor does not keep one minority group in his mind while satirizing the ruling class. It can be said that he somewhere encourages prevailing myths of the society. Literature plays a great role in constructing culture and society. So it becomes the duty of authors to de-construct existing myths about disability so that they can be recognized as a part of society.

Many existing values and beliefs in India related to the disabled people, especially in the mainstream setup, have clear association with religious scriptures and traditional myths. There might be other existing differences in the culture, but these values and beliefs are followed in a similar manner in the different parts of India. However, many resistance over generations have been built to pass on the history, and building the culture – narrating stories of what has been passed for the good of what will appear to pass in the future.

While all the above were discussions of contemporary literary adaptations of the Mahabharata, India being rich in traditions and religions, an epic like Ramayana has also influenced and affected many cultures in India. For Hindus, Lord Ram and Sita, the principal characters of the epic, are seen as ideals in terms of being a perfect man and woman. In many Hindu households, the references of a dutiful son and the good wife, willing to cross the path of fire to prove her devotion towards her husband, are often reminded through their reference. This epic also consists various references to characters with disability: the story of a dutiful son Shraavan Kumar, who looks after his blind parents, and takes their entire responsibility (Ramayana, Ayodhya. 58, 8); another disabled figure is Manthara, the maidservant of queen Kaikeyi who has a hunchback, who poisons her heart against her stepson. (Ramayana. Rajabhisekh. 61, 9). There is another reference linked to disability in the text. The beautiful

sister of king Ravana, Surpanakha gets attracted to the two brothers, Ram and Lakshman. Lakshman, refusing her love, cuts her nose, making her disabled, suggesting that women with disabilities have no right over their sexuality. (Ramayana. Vanvasa. 71, 10).

However, Hindu and Jain traditional writings do reflect resistance of disabled individuals towards the negative connotation that is linked with their dominant culture. In the Indian subcontinent, Jainism is a religion that is based on ideas and concepts of compassion and non-violence towards living beings. The Jain community in India, recognised in sixth century BC the need for inclusion of the disabled people, acknowledging the fact that they can be offended if their condition is announced publicly. The law code in Manu and Arthashashtra prescribed imposition of fine for abusive language or use of euphemisms. However, none of these regulations have made any difference in public or personal use of languages, and the annoyance has been noticed from past 2500 years.²

Buddhism is another religion that originated in the Indian subcontinent and later got spread to the far East, especially in Japan and Korea. Buddhism also believes in the reincarnation and the affect of deeds from the past lives in the present lives, hence the concept of Karma is greatly acknowledged. Therefore, the reason behind impairment is considered to be result of the sins done in the past life, and the disablement is a punishment for those sins. For instance, in Buddhist literature, the story of Khujjutara, a servant of the king, who has a hunchback and makes up her mind to change her life after hearing the Buddha's sermon:

... an unprecedented transformation of the maidservant having a deformity was endorsed by Buddha, who also gave Khujjutara's reference to his disciples. In her past life, she mocked a holy man with a deformity, imitating his stoop at Benares. Therefore, she received an education rebirth having a deformity so that the progression of her soul is not impeded. (Miles, 611)

The references from the different mythologies have more or less common ideas about disability associated with charity, imperfection, punishment, etc. However, there is another tradition which is common to various mythological beliefs, which associates impairments with special powers or skills. Except the negative associations with disability mentioned in

² See Miles M., 2000, "Blind People Handling Their Own Fate. Disability on a Different Model: Glimpses of an Asian Heritage.

the traditional myths and in various religious texts, different cultures follow stereotypical beliefs related to disability as well. Such stereotypes affect the lives of the disabled people in many ways, drawing certain expectations or limiting their life choices. Disabled people define their conditions not in terms of their individual sufferings but in terms of the social oppression they face every day.

Referring to some classical Biblical Texts and portraying the relevance of the will of God being camouflaged with man suffering with his afflictions, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one of those texts where "Man's First Disobedience" is the main theme for the poet. The poet shares the act of disobedience performed by Adam and Eve while also placing the narrative in the larger context of Satan's defiance against God, and Jesus's resurrection, ultimately restoring mankind. Adam is made aware of Satan's disobedience so that he knows the threat connected with the act of disobeying God and this brings out two moral paths in the poem that one can choose to take after they disobey God's will. The first one represents the sin committed by Satan, and the other one is Adam and Eve's journey towards redemption.

Milton, before writing this epic requests the muses to guide him and support him to create a great epic. He mentions that it is an epic that no one has ever tried to write in prose or poetry and its subject is so sublime that its height can be compared with the Aonian mountain.

Milton says, "O Spirit, that dost prefer Before all Temples the upright heart and pure Instructme, for Thou knowst; thou from the first wast present." The poet states that the Muses prefer those humans who have a pure heart and pray in front of the Temple. As Milton is praying in front of the Temple and asking the Muses to support him as they are the only one who have witnessed everything, he prays, "What in me is dark Illumin, what is low raise and support; That to the highth of this great Argument I may assert Eternal Providence, And Justifies the ways of God to men." The most important aspect is that Milton prays to the Muses to bring light to darkness residing inside his mind and develop everything which is low inside him to be a great quality. Milton asserts that it is the will of the Supreme power or the

“Eternal Providence” that it is only him who will write this epic which carries a sublime and critical issue. He strongly feels that he is going to justify the act of God that is meant towards the humankind. As he prays at the temple with purity in his heart, he dares to make this attempt because he believes that the Muses have chosen him to share with the world about the first human disobedience and justify every act of God towards humans. Because he understands that is a difficult task, and it is impossible to complete without anybody’s help hence, he needs the Muses to guide and support him in every manner.

The plot of the ‘Paradise Lost’ is extracted from The Bible that unfolds that fall of Adam and Eve due to their disobedience. The epic reflects more on the Biblical theme. Lucifer, in Heaven (Lucifer is renamed as Satan after being banished from Heaven) does not comply to The God’s agency and rebels against The God’s divine authority. After the terrible war between the Supreme God and Lucifer, he was finally cast into hell along with other rebel angels who suffered in the blazing lake for nine days.

Satan and other rebel angels who deceived God, were thrown into a blazing lake, and were tormented to death all day long. Satan and his demons are to be burned up in the Lake of Fire prepared for them because according to God’s law, death is what they have earned for their sins. However, Satan stands out of the burning lake as a hero with his physical dimensions and size of the tools he carries. Having long, large limbs and a bulk as huge as that of Titan, he fights against Jove or the Leviathan God. His mighty stature leads to the flames roll in billows and get driven backward on both sides of him whenever he rises. He carries a massy, ponderous and large shield on his shoulder which is compared to the moon which is seen through a telescope and his spear is as big as the tallest pine tree. This appearance of Satan could be valid if we look at him as a character who materializes hope and bases his hopes in order to gain power. Satan, having all these great qualities was seen to be as the first created being whose powers could equal God’s and that he could divide the empire of Heaven. His power of action was equal to his power of suffering and his mental strength was as matchless as his strength of body. When Satan gets overthrown to Hell, he was still the greatest power with the strongest will which was left to endure or resist. He is not confounded but baffled

and still stands like a tower with a proud eminent shape and gesture. He is an outcast from Heaven and Hell lies beneath his feet and Sin and Death are his subordinates whereas the mankind is his prey. Although, we see Satan is mentally stronger, but not physically, as his brightness started to become dull and his original shape also got deformed and distorted and he is shown to become a disabled being. Satan gets awakened from a pitch which is burning, and thinks that “all was not lost” and hence, he would now plan a revenge on God. He tries to bring the other fallen angels back into spirits and decides that his purpose can only be fulfilled by guile and not by force and hence, he decides to spoil God’s best creation, Eden, and the humans residing there. The devils create an elaborate palace, Pandemonium, where Satan holds a conference with the fallen angels to plan on the revenge to destroy heaven.

God has inhabited Heaven which is at the top of the universe and accompanied with those angels who do not rebel against him and Jesus Christ (God’s son). In the Heaven, God sits on his eternal throne which is at the peak of the mountain. Because of the light he emanated his image gets shrouded in a cloudy mist and we witness that the primary quality of Heaven is light. The angels who accompany God are also stunning in their appearance but nothing compared to the light of God which oozes out different colours. The angels observe God through a cloud and witness God’s pure light. One of God’s angels, Raphael, is described as being created of “colors dypt in Heaven”. Milton reflects this Heaven of light similar to the command of God in Genesis where he says, “let there be light, and there was light.”

Some fallen angels, like Mammon, propose the idea to peacefully improve hell so that it might be equal to Heaven, whereas Beelzebub arises and informs that God has created Earth and has peopled it with creatures called humans. He further proposes the possibility to investigate God’s new creation, seize it and seduce the humans against God’s will. Satan approves the idea and starts approaching Earth when Gabriel, God’s angel, appoints angels from Heaven to protect Adam and Eve from Satan’s falsities but they were too late as Satan had already created an influence in Eve’s dreams where Eve gets tempted by the forbidden fruit and eats it.

God sends Raphael, an angel from Heaven to tell about the Forbidden Tree of Knowledge. The angel tells them about the great war between the God and the fallen angels. He tells them of the creation of the Earth, and how the God was praised for his best creation by the angelic choir. Next morning, when both of them prepare to leave, Eve wishes to work alone and Adam, recollecting the warning given by Raphael, opposes her wish, but Eve does not listen and she parts her way. Satan enters a sleeping serpent's body, and approaches Eve, flattering her to consume the fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge.

Eve eats the fruit and gives it to Adam, who gets horrified but he also eats it because he is in love with her. As they both eat the fruit they experience the feeling of lust for the first time. They realise the feeling of shame and cover their bodies immediately. Later, the guardian angel arrives on Earth to pass judgment, and sentences the serpent to be an enemy of mankind forever. He also announces a punishment for Eve where she would experience deep sorrow and pain while bearing children and she would never be equal to Adam. For Adam, Christ reveals that he would always eat his bread in sorrow, and would be able to earn the bread after excess of sweating and hard work. Apart from being punished, Adam and Eve lose God's grace as well. After Gabriel's announcement of the punishments, Sin and Death leave Hell and join Earth. Satan, on the other hand, arrives back to Hell and find all his fellow angels turned into snakes and they all are shown to be malicious and disabled.

After the fall, God made some changes on Earth. He made the eternal spring season transformed to changing seasons and he created violence and storms, floods, earthquakes and winds. Adam and Eve, after seeing the devastation, think of committing suicide and Michael, an angel of God, gives them new hope. He provides Adam the knowledge of death and life, the rising and the downfall of empires and kingdoms. He shows them how their destruction would be corrected by the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. When Michael finishes, Adam and Eve sigh with relief, especially when they see their children will be saved. They arrive to the plains which are barren, leaving the heights of the paradise, metaphorically falling from the God's blessing to current state of guilt, shame, mortality and suffering.

In this epic, Milton uses the theme of “fall” which is taken from the Bible, and the poet blends it with hidden Puritan beliefs that also included Renaissance humanism and his political and domestic ideals. He creates invocation in the beginning as he requests the Muse which is a spirit that would guide him to write this epic. The Fall of the man is followed by God’s retribution, and then the path taken towards salvation are the central themes of the poem, justifying how God’s actions are always right in terms of his treatment towards humans. The poet helps the readers to explore the idea of sin that brings the ultimate damnation in a man’s life. He depicts the main reason behind the damnation as Eve’s disobedience led by her overwhelming passion to find reason. Even Adam is shown guilty of disobedience as he chooses his passion which is his profound love for Eve over God’s will. In the poem, Milton signifies the concept of reason. He conveys that man is noble by nature and hence, he is responsible for his free will, action and good and bad morals. Milton negates the belief in Calvinism which states that God has decided everything for a man and his destiny is fixed right before his birth. He follows the humanist belief which says that liberty and adventure are important aspects of mankind. His belief that God’s acts are justified when he left Adam and Eve being vulnerable to the evils, and allowing them to experience reasoning freely, defines that human beings are made to be supreme creatures. However, God was also justified to punish Adam and Eve, which ultimately asserts his eternal providence.

However, Milton seemed to believe in the conventional idea of redemption. It is only when men can seek redemption through Jesus, that they can attain a state which is far more excellent than Paradise, and which is why Adam and Eve’s fall happened, and it is said that Adam did a good job by committing the sin. Critics express, “Paradise Lost is a mental pilgrimage; the loss of one paradise and the finding on this earth of a paradise within ourselves, that is happier far”. Before the sin was committed, Adam and Eve’s life was like a prison that did not allow them to explore the concept of Reason at all. This policy might have brought peace with The God, but it would have impeded humans’ spiritual development, and as long as humans are deprived of reason and knowledge,

their obedience towards God is meaningless. Adam and Eve's virtue was "fugitive and cloistered", and therefore, it carried no virtue in the real sense. Man lost because of his disobedience out of his innocence, but they are also reborn spiritually by having a control over their passions, finding a "Paradise" within them and it is also evident that the idea of disability prevails in Milton's Paradise Lost just like how it has been described in the Bible.

We learn that Eve and Adam are the first human beings who disobeyed God, while Satan who was God's first creation disobeyed him, and his will to go against him, and disobey him, was completely self-motivated. Even after the fall, he decides to take revenge against God, which is why God fails to forgive him. Whereas, Eve and Adam ask for forgiveness after committing the sin for which they did manage to seek forgiveness from God. Unlike Satan's stubborn behaviour, Adam and Eve introspect about their faulty behaviour, seek forgiveness, which can be corrected after generations of hard work on Earth. This suggests that this was the morally correct path and hence, even after repeated falls, one can always seek salvation.

Paradise Lost also depicts the theme of hierarchy as much as it depicts the theme of disobedience and immorality. The universe is made such that Heaven is above, Hell is below, and the Earth resides in the middle and this represents the hierarchical structure. However, there is also a hierarchy amongst the angels, humans, devils and animals. The Son (Jesus Christ) is closest to the God followed by the archangel and cherubs behind him. Adam and Eve and the animals on Earth come next to Jesus and finally, Satan and other fallen angels come last. Therefore, in order to obey God, one has to respect this hierarchy.

Satan's unacceptability to honour God as his superior, led to the war between him and God. Satan's angels in Hell aspire to defeat God, and destroy the hierarchy. When Jesus Christ and the good angels win over the rebel angels, they are thrown away from Heaven to Hell.

However, Satan plans of building a hierarchical structure in hell similar to that which God built in Heaven because they refused being at the lowest rank in God's hierarchy, and Satan continues to go against The God's will, and corrupt mankind.

Corruption on God's hierarchy derives from humankind's disobedience. The time prior to the fall, Adam and Eve shared a profound connection with God and other angels, treating them respectfully where Eve cherished the submissive role asked of her to play in her relationship with Adam. However, when Eve asks Adam to allow her to work by herself, she provokes and challenges Adam's superiority and God's will. When Adam agrees to eat the forbidden fruit, he subsequently defies God's will. Adam's disobedience in Book XI and Book XII leads to destruction of the universe's hierarchy but Christ's sacrifice helps in the restoring of the hierarchy one again.

Adam considers his sin as a "happy fault" after seeing Christ's redemption to the mankind that suggests the downfall of the man, despite the catastrophe, brings along goodness. The disobedience permits God to showcase his forgiveness and anger while punishing humans. Therefore, this display of compassion and love given by Christ is a blessing for the humankind. While humankind would have to face death and suffering, they would also encounter forgiveness, salvation or grace through many ways. When humankind would fall from grace, it can save itself by being completely devoted and obedient towards God. A man's salvation is because of Christ's sacrifice that helped in the restoration of mankind in its formal state. This symbolises that good eventually comes out of evil and a man shall be rewarded. Therefore, this result showcases God's ultimate plan for humankind and despite the revolutions mentioned in the text, the poet's idea of disability coincides with that which is mentioned in the Bible.

Milton tries to reflect a significant message with his epic as we see Satan, who was extremely and admirably beautiful in his appearance earlier when his physical dimensions and the size of the tools he carries mark him out as a kind of hero, becomes awful and carries an ugly and dismantled figure later in the poem. He gets transformed into a state where he cannot stand erect and see morality and righteousness and thus has inculcated profound darkness inside him. As we see, the epic has taken some ideas from the Bible, we also witness that Milton portrays the significance of God's will while treating humans either with afflictions or good health, however, the main duty of the man is to accept everything that God provides

to him and to never demean him for bringing sorrow and pain in his life. Therefore, a man who is suffering manages to perform his duty obediently and can ultimately seek salvation.

Another poem by John Milton, “On his Blindness”, is an autobiographical work which reflects on the concept of disability and suffering through the poet’s eyes. It is a poem where the poet meditates on his loss of vision reflecting the time when he lost his eyesight very early in his life. He feels as if the world became dark and wide but what had hurt him the most was that his talent of being a poet could not be made useful. As he loses his vision, it was impossible for him to read or write anything. He had hoped to write many poems but he felt as if he has now lost the chance to create anything. He wishes that he present his work to God on the day of judgement, when all the souls are present together to meet God and prove that he (Milton) has made the best use of the talent that God has bestowed on him, but due to his blindness, Milton feels that his disability denied him that chance and in profound agony and anger, he questions God that if he wanted him (Milton) to use his talent to write poetry then why did he take away his eyesight. To this, the Goddess of patience answers Milton saying that God does not want any service or gifts from man but people who accept God and his decision cheerfully and willingly, they are the best servers to God. For God, man and his work are nothing before him but only those who stand and wait with patience, bearing their suffering without any murmuring are the true devotees of God.

Before losing his sight, Milton was able to see perfectly but due to his late night reading and writing while he was working for the government of the English Commonwealth, in which Milton held a very significant position, he ultimately ruined his vision. Just like everyone in society, Milton too believed that blindness can be a hindrance for him for which he contemplates on the devastating effects it has brought in his work and life. However, it is worthy to note that after writing “On his Blindness”, Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* which is his most popular epic. Milton, in his sonnets, equates his blindness with “light spent”. He does not lament for being handicapped but for the limitations blindness brings to his work as a poet. He considers that his poetic abilities carry huge importance and he calls it as “that one talent”, suggesting to his readers that it is the only talent that matters to him. When

he says “lodges with me useless”, it carries an expression which suggests the impossibilities which are rendered by his blindness. He expresses distress because he desires to write more poetry

but cannot find any way to continue as his blindness has imposed a double limitation on his poetic functioning. To be precise, it has made poetry as impossible activity for him as there is no way for a man without vision to bring words to paper. Moreover, the loss of his vision means to him that he could no longer read and no longer learn anything in future.

Milton uses words like ‘consider’ which suggests the importance of a rational and careful thought rather than a purely emotional reaction. We also find the speaker using his reason which according to Renaissance Christians is God’s one of the greatest gifts that he bestowed on humans. They believed that ability to reason helps them to connect with God and

distinguishes them from the animals. The speaker states that his “light is spent” (extinguished). However, the word clearly suggests that the speaker is lamenting for his loss sight but “light” can also allude the meaning of one’s intelligence. The image of “light” carries huge significance in the poem. Looking at the most superficial levels, it denotes the physical light which the poet states that he no longer can experience. To this, Milton refers to a story from the Gospel of John (John IX, 1-7) which includes the incident where Jesus miraculously cures a blind beggar. However, the image of light is mentioned on various different levels in the Bible and Milton tries to reflect that image in his poetry as well. He mentions that when Jesus tells his disciples that “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work”, it suggests that daylight is a metaphor for man’s life and like each day, lives are also limited, and once the night arrives, the day is gone forever. This reflects Milton’s absolute pathos because he believes that the amount of darkness his blindness has brought, has brought an end to his creative life as well. As he writes “talent which is death to hide”, it suggests that his blindness will stop him from achieving another longer life which is immortal and that includes the enormous fame a poet receives after writing a masterpiece.

On the other hand, Milton states that light also signifies the inner light which is the spiritual light that resides inside a poet. He mentions the story of the Gospel where Christ calls himself “the light of the world”, and that he is the messenger of God. Similarly, Milton believes that poets are also light bringers and just like Jesus, their works bring enlightenment amongst the humans. He conveys that the idea of losing one’s own sight is a deeply troubling one which brings a blind person close towards vulnerability and every kind of risk. And the speaker reflects his vulnerability when he states that he can no longer see, literally, and can no longer protect himself from dangers. The speaker repents the tragedy of losing his sight at such an unusual stage of life where he now inhabits a world which seems “dark” that reflects two meanings first, that nothing is physically visible to him now and second, that the world is made of spiritual darkness and sin. We would find a similar reference being reflected in the Bible as well.

Milton refers to another story from the Gospel of Matthew which includes the parable of the talents. In this story, a master provides each of his three servants a sum of money which are symbolically “talents”, which they are asked to keep while he is undertaking a journey. When the master returns and asks each one of them for the money, he learns that the first two have used the money wisely and appropriately and they return twice the sum of the money they were given by the master. However, the third servant only buries his talent which made the master very angry at him and ends up casting him “in the outer darkness”. Milton reflects the moral factor in the story by suggesting that a man should be aware of the gifts given by God because there will a judgment day where everyone has to “present one’s true account” in front of God. By this, Milton suggests two meanings of “talent”, one is in terms of money, and the other is the God-given ability. The poet fears that due to his blindness he will fail at putting put his God-given ability into good use.

He mentions that a “wicked and slothful servant” was cast into darkness which suggests that “it is death to hide” one’s own talent and hence, it would end in the form of punishment where the man would be cast out of the light and ultimately out of God’s presence. Milton states that he hasn’t been called to give his “true accounts” yet and his soul hurts because he cannot make proper use of his talent

and due to the darkness, which he has been put into, ultimately prevents him from doing God's duty which is why he ends up asking God as to how he can expect from him to do a duty which he himself has made apparently impossible.

We have to remember that technology was not available at the time of the renaissance age but still Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* and made use of his talent and still he considers that blindness can create hindrance in his life to explore and make use of his talent. The poet states that man's duty is not to give God anything as he has no need of a man's work and according to Milton, everything a man possesses is "his own gifts". The poet suggests that a humble resignation to God's wills and wishes is the only course of action which is open for him during a catastrophe like Milton's blindness and the passage from John's gospel also states something similar: "who best/bear his mild yoke, they serve him best".

Jesus also tells his disciples that a man without vision did not lose his vision because God punished him, "but that the work of God should be made manifest in him", as discussed in chapter 3rd. Milton believes that accepting God's agency will lead a man to salvation. He states that some humans are meant for action in order to "speed/ and post o'er the land and ocean without rest", while others "who only stand and wait", as a servant waiting for his master's bidding or a labourer waiting to be hired for work, abide by God's will.

Milton contemplates that due to his disability, his poetic talent which is God gifted should not remain useless and if it remains useless God will be angry at him which is why the poet feels extremely vulnerable to fulfil the mission of his life. He is often found comparing his inability to use his talent to the death of physical, mental or spiritual state. He asks God if he still expects any service from him after taking his eyesight and he further suspects his own capabilities by contemplating that if God does expect him to work for him, will he be able to fulfil it in the end or not. Milton realises his own foolishness of suspecting God and concludes by saying that God does not require any kind of service from a man and he never takes back the gift which he bestowed on a man. It is folly on a man's part to think that God demands some form of service from him, and question the almighty and the supreme. People who are the most patient and surrender themselves to God's will without any grumble, those who endure all mental, physical and spiritual

sufferings which God inflicts on them, are the ones who serve Him the best. The poet after calm and careful thinking believes that the question of disservice to God is completely nonsensical because God is omnipotent, he is the Lord of the lords and the King of the kings and is extremely powerful. He possesses countless divine servants and angels who carry out his commands on Earth and hence, questioning his supreme power is an act of folly by a man.

The poem gives us a little glimpse of Milton's philosophy of life. The poet conveys that even if he is visually disabled and unable to serve God, he should continue being loyal towards him. He emphasises that even silent attendance is a form of service to God. The sonnet shows that it is personally very close to Milton and his faith in the Almighty is unshakeable and how his blindness led to deep sorrow inside him as he had experienced only half of his life. We get to learn that Milton was forty-four when he lost his vision and that time he was broken down with extreme grief, despair and disappointment.

The only thing that gets him relief was his faith in the mercy and justice of God. However, the sonnet is filled with abundant pathos, reflecting Milton's personal grief and despair.

Milton is known to have possessed a lofty and noble character and his conduct is similar to his temperament and nature. Due to his disability, he does not weep like an ordinary man and lose heart, whereas he is seen enduring the suffering with fortitude and bearing the loss of eyesight in the most courageous manner. Milton, employs profound patience to solve an age-old question which says, 'Does God require the service of man?'. The poet answers to this by stating that those who submit themselves unquestioningly to the will and wishes of God are his most loyal and best servants. The poet personifies patience as a way that speaks to him and helps him in rescuing him from his dilemma. The divine idea and message is repeated with huge emphasis, suggesting that unbounded faith in God's generosity and mercy should not only be followed by those who are afflicted but by every man on Earth. The poet's persona as 'I' represents all human beings who have eyes but live spiritually in darkness.

Despite the whole idea of darkness followed by extreme pathos, Milton writes "On his Blindness" and "Paradise Lost" that is the most prominent English epic. However,

we find that he believed in the discourse on disabilities or blindness in the similar way it is believed and followed in the Bible and in the entire society. Milton too tries to suggest that believing in God and leading the leading the right path will lead man to achieve salvation ultimately.

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