

Trauma, Subalternity, and Postmodern Revision in Ashutosh Nadkar's Shakuni: Master of the Game

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ABSTRACT:

Mythological characters frequently move between archetype and reinterpretation across shifting historical and literary contexts. Shakuni, traditionally represented in the Mahabharata as the principal instigator of the Kurukshetra war and the embodiment of strategic malevolence, occupies a morally contested space in contemporary retellings (Hiltebeitel, 2001; Brockington, 1998). This article examines Shakuni: Master of the Game by Ashutosh Nadkar through the frameworks of trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), subaltern studies (Guha, 1982; Spivak, 1988), and postmodern myth revisionism. It argues that Nadkar's narrative unsettles inherited moral binaries by reconfiguring Shakuni as politically marginalized, psychologically wounded, and intellectually formidable. Through close analysis of episodes including the imprisonment of the Gandhara royal family, the Lakshagriha conspiracy, and the Game of Dice, the study demonstrates that Shakuni's villainy emerges as a historically conditioned response to humiliation and dispossession rather than innate depravity. The article situates Nadkar's work within contemporary revisionist mythography in Indian English literature, where antagonistic figures are granted narrative interiority and ethical complexity. Ultimately, it contends that Shakuni embodies the tragic convergence of agency, memory, and structural violence, thereby challenging readers to reconsider the moral architecture of epic narrative traditions.

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 Keywords: Shakuni, trauma theory, subaltern studies, myth revisionism, Mahabharata

Introduction

The Mahabharata remains one of the most structurally intricate narrative compositions in world literature. Traditionally attributed to Vyasa, the epic resists singular interpretation and functions simultaneously as political chronicle, philosophical inquiry, ethical meditation, and tragic exploration of kinship and sovereignty (Hiltebeitel, 2001; Brockington, 1998). Its narrative universe does not rest upon rigid binaries of virtue and vice; rather, it sustains moral ambiguity, psychological density, and shifting ethical perspectives. Characters inhabit zones of uncertainty where motives are layered and actions rarely conform to fixed moral categories.

Despite this complexity, centuries of oral transmission, regional redactions, devotional reinterpretations, theatrical performances, and modern visual adaptations have often stabilized certain figures into archetypal roles. Cultural memory and pedagogical moralization have gradually produced emblematic heroes and villains—figures functioning as symbolic referents within collective consciousness (Assmann, 2011). Among those most persistently simplified is Shakuni, Prince of Gandhara. In dominant retellings, he is canonized as the embodiment of deceit, manipulation, and calculated destruction—the architect of the war at Kurukshetra.

Shakuni's narrative identity is primarily anchored in the infamous Game of Dice, one of the epic's most consequential episodes. His orchestration of the gambling match between Yudhishtira and Duryodhana precipitates Draupadi's humiliation, the exile of the Pandavas, and the irreversible fragmentation of dynastic unity. In popular renderings, this episode seals his moral position. He appears as a calculating instigator who exploits Yudhishtira's vulnerability and amplifies Duryodhana's envy. Within this interpretive frame, Shakuni becomes less a

human agent than a symbolic force of adharmā—an external corrupter destabilizing an already fragile political order.

Contemporary myth retellings, however, resist such moral absolutism. Modern authors revisit epic narratives not to reproduce inherited judgments but to interrogate them. They shift narrative focalization and grant voice to characters previously confined to antagonistic or marginal roles. By enabling such figures to narrate their own histories, these retellings reopen ethical questions long presumed settled. They ask not only what characters do, but what historical, psychological, and political forces shape their choices; not merely how events unfold, but how trauma, exclusion, and power asymmetry structure human action.

In *Shakuni: Master of the Game*, Ashutosh Nadkar re-centres the epic narrative within Shakuni's consciousness. The novel adopts a confessional mode, granting retrospective authority to the so-called villain. This narrative repositioning is decisive: once the antagonist narrates, the moral geometry of the epic shifts. The reader inhabits his injuries, loyalties, calculations, and rage. Shakuni emerges not as demonic conspirator but as political strategist formed through humiliation and dispossession. His destructive agency is reframed as historically conditioned response rather than intrinsic malice.

Such reinterpretation aligns with broader developments in contemporary Indian English fiction, where mythological figures are revisited through psychological and socio-political frameworks. Characters once stabilized within mythic typologies are reimaged as subjects of trauma, displacement, and ideological conflict. This interpretive shift parallels theoretical movements in trauma studies (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), subaltern historiography (Guha, 1982; Spivak, 1988), psychoanalytic criticism, and narrative ethics, all of which foreground voice, interiority, and the politics of representation.

Within this intellectual climate, villainy ceases to be a fixed moral category and becomes instead a contested interpretive site.

Re-evaluating Shakuni also requires attention to the geopolitical context embedded in the epic. Gandhara, situated along the northwestern frontier, occupies a liminal space within the narrative imagination of Hastinapura. It represents alliance yet alterity—politically connected yet culturally peripheral. Shakuni's presence in the Kuru court is mediated through Gandhari's marriage to Dhritarashtra, an alliance frequently interpreted as diplomatic consolidation. Alternative readings, however, foreground its coercive undertones. Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself has traditionally signified wifely devotion, yet it may equally be read as symbolic protest. Within this framework, Shakuni's resentment toward the Kuru establishment acquires political and emotional coherence.

The psychological dimension of his characterization becomes central to contemporary reinterpretation. Trauma theory posits that unresolved collective injury may generate cycles of repetition and retaliatory behavior (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). If Gandhara experienced humiliation or marginalization within its alliance with the Kurus—as later narrative traditions suggest—then Shakuni's strategies may be read as retaliatory agency. His mastery of dice, often mythologized as supernatural cunning, may instead function as symbolic capital: the instrument through which an outsider negotiates power within structures that deny him conventional authority.

Shakuni's relationship with Duryodhana further complicates reductive villainy. He is frequently depicted as the corrupter who poisons the prince's mind. Yet another perspective reveals him as mentor, confidant, and surrogate patriarch. In a court dominated by figures such as Bhishma and Drona—embodying rigid adherence to hierarchical dharma—Shakuni offers Duryodhana affirmation and strategic counsel. Whether this guidance constitutes

corruption or solidarity depends upon the ethical lens adopted. The ambiguity underscores the epic's resistance to moral simplification.

The Game of Dice itself demands reconsideration beyond its conventional framing as treachery. Gambling in epic tradition symbolizes the instability of sovereignty and the vulnerability of order to chance. Yudhishtira's participation is not enforced by violence; it emerges from his adherence to kshatriya codes and personal weakness. By foregrounding Shakuni's manipulation while minimizing Yudhishtira's agency, traditional readings externalize culpability. Contemporary reinterpretations restore complexity by situating the episode within a network of shared responsibility.

Nadkar's narrative strategy exemplifies how focalization reshapes moral perception. When Shakuni narrates, memory becomes political. He recounts not only events but grievances—imprisonment, familial annihilation, humiliation, exile. Whether these accounts align with canonical versions becomes secondary to their psychological truth. The novel operates within speculative historiography, where myth becomes a terrain for ethical re-examination rather than doctrinal closure.

This repositioning aligns with postcolonial literary practice, wherein classical texts are revisited to recover suppressed perspectives and destabilize hegemonic readings. Shakuni's transformation from archetypal villain to wounded strategist reflects a broader cultural impulse to interrogate binary structures embedded within mythic memory. Such reinterpretations do not erase accountability; rather, they complicate the grounds upon which judgment is formed.

Interdisciplinary frameworks deepen this complexity. Psychoanalytic criticism may interpret Shakuni's obsession with revenge as displacement of unresolved grief. Trauma studies situate his conduct within cycles of inherited suffering. Political analysis foregrounds peripheral kingdoms negotiating power within imperial centers. Narrative ethics examines how

shifts in storytelling authority alter moral evaluation. Across these frameworks, Shakuni appears not as caricatured evil but as intersectional figure shaped by injury and structural violence.

Contemporary literature increasingly humanizes antagonists, recognizing that destructive behavior frequently emerges from systemic conditions rather than innate depravity. Within the epic's expansive moral universe, even revered heroes enact ethically ambiguous choices. Against this backdrop, isolating Shakuni as singular cause of catastrophe appears reductive.

The central question, therefore, is not whether Shakuni's actions contribute to disaster—they undeniably do—but whether those actions arise from intrinsic malice or historically situated grievance. Does epic structure require a villain to stabilize moral order, and has Shakuni been cast into that role to preserve the ethical coherence of others? Modern retellings invite renewed scrutiny.

This article engages these interpretive possibilities. By situating Shakuni at the intersection of trauma, marginalization, and strategic intellect, it challenges the fixity of his villainous identity. Drawing upon trauma studies, subaltern historiography, and narrative theory, the study reframes his motivations within a more nuanced ethical matrix—one acknowledging the interplay between agency and structural constraint.

In revisiting Shakuni through Nadkar's novel, this study contributes to broader debates on myth adaptation in Indian English fiction. Contemporary retellings function as sites of cultural negotiation where inherited narratives are reinterpreted through modern concerns about justice, memory, and identity. Shakuni's transformation from archetypal antagonist to psychologically complex subject exemplifies this dialogic process.

The endurance of the Mahabharata lies precisely in its resistance to closure. Its characters defy containment within rigid moral binaries and remain open to reinterpretation across

generations. Shakuni, long fixed as embodiment of deceit, now invites renewed ethical inquiry. By examining the historical, psychological, and narrative dimensions of his portrayal, this study reopens interpretive space and demonstrates that within epic tradition, villainy is rarely absolute.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Trauma Theory

The reinterpretation of Shakuni in *Shakuni: Master of the Game* may be rigorously examined through trauma theory, a framework developed within literary and cultural studies by scholars such as Cathy Caruth (1996) and Dominick LaCapra (2001). Trauma theory shifts interpretive emphasis from moral judgment to psychic injury. Trauma, in this paradigm, is not merely a catastrophic event but an experience that overwhelms comprehension and resists immediate narrative integration. It disrupts temporal continuity, returning belatedly through compulsive repetition, intrusive memory, and distorted action. The subject does not simply remember trauma; rather, trauma insists upon repetition until symbolically processed.

When applied to mythic reinterpretation, trauma theory reframes character analysis. Instead of asking whether a figure embodies virtue or vice, the critic interrogates the foundational wound structuring subsequent conduct. This shift is especially illuminating in the case of Shakuni, whose canonical portrayal in the Mahabharata foregrounds cunning but rarely examines psychological formation. Traditional narratives emphasize strategic manipulation; they seldom investigate the interior conditions from which such strategy emerges.

In Nadkar's retelling, the imprisonment and starvation of King Subala and the Gandhara royal family operate as primal trauma. The episode is not incidental backstory but the psychic origin of Shakuni's identity. Systematic deprivation—where sustenance is rationed so that only one family member survives—constitutes moral catastrophe. The paternal command that Shakuni alone consume the limited food inscribes survival as burden. He lives because others die. This

structural inversion of filial loyalty produces what trauma theorists describe as survivor's guilt, a condition marked by persistent self-reproach and obsessive recollection (LaCapra, 2001).

Trauma theory further identifies "acting out" as compulsive repetition of unresolved injury. Shakuni's commitment to vengeance may be interpreted through this lens. His political strategies exceed rational calculation; they enact symbolic restitution. The destruction of the Kuru dynasty becomes allegorical reversal of Gandhara's annihilation. Revenge is not merely ambition but reenactment—an attempt to master what was once endured in helplessness. In this framework, Shakuni's agency appears simultaneously deliberate and psychologically compelled.

The crippling of Shakuni's leg, emphasized in Nadkar's narrative, functions as embodied trauma. The limp is not incidental characterization but corporeal inscription of violence. Trauma studies note that unassimilated memory often becomes somatized; the body retains what narrative cannot resolve (Caruth, 1996). Shakuni's physical impairment thus operates as mnemonic scar—both stigma and reminder. It converts personal suffering into strategic resolve, transforming bodily vulnerability into symbolic weapon.

Temporal disruption is equally significant. Trauma fractures linear chronology; the past recurs within present consciousness. Shakuni's narrative repeatedly returns to imprisonment, suggesting that revenge unfolds within suspended temporality. The Game of Dice may therefore be read as symbolic inversion of starvation. In prison, scarcity determined survival; in Hastinapura's court, sovereignty and wealth are gambled through calculated manipulation. Shakuni transforms deprivation into spectacle, converting remembered helplessness into orchestrated control.

Within this theoretical paradigm, villainy becomes symptomatic rather than essential. Shakuni's destructive conduct emerges from unresolved grief and systemic humiliation. Trauma theory does not absolve responsibility;

rather, it complicates ethical evaluation by situating violence within cycles of injury and repetition. Revenge appears morally troubling yet psychologically intelligible. The critic thus confronts dual recognition: Shakuni's actions are catastrophic, yet they arise from historically situated trauma rather than innate depravity.

At a broader interpretive level, trauma theory also illuminates the epic itself. The Mahabharata is saturated with collective wounds—fraternal rivalry, exile, humiliation, betrayal, and mass death (Hiltebeitel, 2001). Shakuni's personal injury mirrors the epic's pervasive atmosphere of unresolved grievance. His trauma functions as conduit through which private suffering escalates into civilizational catastrophe. By reframing Shakuni within this psychic architecture, Nadkar's novel destabilizes simplistic moral binaries and restores psychological depth to a figure long reduced to archetypal deceit.

2.2. Subaltern Studies

While trauma theory illuminates Shakuni's psychic interiority, subaltern studies clarifies his geopolitical marginalization. Emerging from South Asian historiography through scholars such as Ranajit Guha (1982) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), subaltern studies interrogates the mechanisms by which dominant narratives silence peripheral voices. It questions whose history is recorded, whose agency is recognized, and whose perspective defines legitimacy. The subaltern, in this formulation, is not merely economically oppressed but discursively marginalized—positioned outside structures that authorize speech.

Within the epic's political landscape, Gandhara occupies a liminal and peripheral position. Allied to Hastinapura through Gandhari's marriage to Dhritarashtra, it remains culturally distinct and geographically distant. Shakuni, though a prince in his homeland, enters the Kuru court as derivative authority. His influence is mediated through kinship rather than sovereign command. He is present yet structurally secondary, included yet never central. This liminality produces political vulnerability.

In dominant readings of the Mahabharata, the Kuru court functions as normative political center, embodying the axis of dharmic order. Shakuni appears as destabilizing external force—intruder rather than participant. A subaltern lens disrupts this alignment. It asks: whose order is preserved by labeling him deviant? If the epic privileges Hastinapura's vantage point, then Gandhara's grievance becomes backgrounded, rendered incidental to imperial stability. Subaltern theory compels recognition that historical narratives frequently normalize the perspective of power (Guha, 1982).

Nadkar's novel performs a strategic reversal of this hierarchy. By granting Shakuni narrative authority, the text enacts what Spivak (1988) describes as the recovery of silenced subjectivity. The marginalized figure narrates his own history, articulates injury, and reclaims interpretive space. This does not erase canonical authority but contests its exclusivity. The shift in focalization reframes deviance as resistance and cunning as counter-hegemonic intelligence.

Subaltern studies further emphasizes how dominant regimes classify resistance as immorality. From the standpoint of the Kuru establishment, Shakuni's strategies appear deceptive and ethically corrosive. Yet from Gandhara's perspective, such strategies may represent asymmetrical negotiation of power. Lacking military dominance or institutional control, Shakuni deploys intellect as primary resource. The dice symbolize tactical capital—instrument of a peripheral subject contesting centralized authority through indirect means.

This interpretive shift destabilizes the binary between dharma and adharma. Moral codes are rarely neutral; they are embedded within power relations. If Gandhara experienced coercion or humiliation within its alliance, then Shakuni's conduct may be read as counter-hegemonic retaliation rather than gratuitous corruption. Subaltern studies does not romanticize rebellion; it acknowledges that resistance may reproduce violence. Yet it insists that analysis attend to structural asymmetry before assigning moral absolutes (Guha, 1982).

Shakuni's alliance with Duryodhana gains renewed significance within this framework. Conventional interpretation positions him as corrupter of a susceptible prince. A subaltern perspective recognizes shared marginalization. Duryodhana, overshadowed by Pandava legitimacy and dynastic favoritism, experiences political insecurity. Shakuni identifies this grievance and forges alliance grounded in mutual resentment. Their bond becomes coalition of the dislocated—peripheral prince and insecure heir united by perceived exclusion.

Moreover, Shakuni's outsider status shapes his method of engagement. He cannot command armies nor directly inherit sovereignty. His strategies therefore operate within existing structures, manipulating procedural mechanisms rather than confronting them militarily. The Game of Dice exemplifies this tactic. It exploits legal codes rather than violating them outright, revealing how subaltern agency may operate through strategic reinterpretation of dominant rules.

By foregrounding Gandhara's suffering and Shakuni's mediated authority, Nadkar destabilizes epic center-periphery dynamics. The so-called villain becomes politically situated subject negotiating legitimacy within imperial hierarchy. His intelligence emerges not as arbitrary malice but as adaptive response to marginalization.

Subaltern studies thus reframes Shakuni's role in the epic. He ceases to be singular corrupter of order and becomes instead displaced actor navigating asymmetrical power. His resistance generates catastrophe, yet it originates within structural exclusion rather than inherent depravity. Through this lens, villainy appears not fixed moral identity but position produced through narrative centralization. Nadkar's retelling reopens that position, permitting ethical reconsideration of a figure long confined to epic margins.

2.3. Postmodern Myth Revisionism

The third interpretive framework, postmodern myth revisionism, situates Nadkar's novel within

broader literary movements that revisit canonical narratives in order to interrogate inherited moral certainties. Postmodern thought is marked by skepticism toward singular truth claims, stable identity formations, and authoritative narration (Lyotard, 1984; Hutcheon, 1988). When applied to mythic material, it produces retellings that fragment grand narratives and multiply perspectives, transforming epic from closed moral archive into contested interpretive field.

Contemporary Indian English fiction has increasingly reimagined mythological figures by granting interiority to characters historically marginalized or demonized. This revisionist impulse reflects heightened cultural attentiveness to plurality, historical silencing, and ethical ambiguity. Rather than reaffirming epic characters as fixed moral types, such narratives expose contradictions, hesitations, and suppressed motivations. Myth becomes dialogic rather than declarative.

Shakuni: Master of the Game exemplifies this revisionist mode. By adopting a confessional or first-person narrative structure, Nadkar disrupts the aura of omniscient authority traditionally associated with epic storytelling. The shift in focalization is epistemologically significant: when Shakuni narrates, certainty dissolves into perspective. Memory becomes subjective and ethically charged. The narrative does not claim absolute truth but foregrounds partial recollection, grievance, and interpretation. This aligns with Hutcheon's (1988) notion of historiographic metafiction, wherein historical or mythic narratives are re-presented as self-conscious reconstructions rather than transparent accounts.

Postmodern myth revisionism also resists moral closure. Nadkar's novel neither canonizes nor absolves Shakuni. Instead, it produces narrative ambiguity. Readers encounter competing ethical frameworks without definitive adjudication. This indeterminacy reflects Lyotard's (1984) critique of totalizing meta-narratives; epic morality is no longer treated as singular or unquestionable but as historically mediated and interpretively unstable.

Central to this framework is interrogation of villainy itself. In classical epic structures, antagonists stabilize heroic virtue. The villain functions as ethical counterpoint, consolidating moral hierarchy. Revisionist retellings destabilize this binary by revealing how heroes themselves engage in ethically ambiguous actions. Within the Mahabharata, revered figures such as Bhishma, Drona, and even Yudhishtira participate in decisions that produce suffering. Against this broader moral complexity, isolating Shakuni as the sole embodiment of adharma appears narratively convenient but ethically reductive.

Postmodern revisionism foregrounds narrative power: who tells the story shapes who becomes villain. By transferring narrative authority to Shakuni, Nadkar exposes how moral labels emerge from perspective rather than immutable truth. Villainy appears as discursive construction, stabilized through repetition across cultural memory. Once the marginalized figure speaks, the category itself becomes unstable.

Furthermore, revisionism challenges teleological inevitability. Traditional epic structures often frame catastrophe as destiny unfolding within cosmic order. Nadkar's narrative instead emphasizes contingency—choices shaped by trauma, resentment, and political calculation. The war at Kurukshetra is not divine inevitability but cumulative consequence of human decisions. This emphasis on contingency reflects postmodern resistance to deterministic explanation.

The novel's emphasis on psychological interiority also aligns with revisionist ethics. By exploring Shakuni's grief, humiliation, and loyalty, the narrative complicates moral judgment without erasing accountability. Postmodern retellings do not simply invert moral hierarchies; they complicate them. Shakuni remains architect of destruction, yet he is no longer reducible to abstraction.

Myth revisionism thus complements trauma theory and subaltern studies. Trauma theory humanizes psychological suffering; subaltern studies contextualizes geopolitical marginalization; postmodernism interrogates

epistemological foundations of moral labeling. Together, these frameworks dismantle moral fixity and restore ambiguity intrinsic to epic narrative.

Through this lens, *Shakuni: Master of the Game* participates in a broader cultural movement that treats myth not as immutable doctrine but as living discourse. By reconfiguring Shakuni from archetypal villain into ethically unsettled subject, the novel demonstrates how epic traditions remain open to reinterpretation across historical moments. Villainy becomes inquiry rather than verdict, and myth becomes dialogic arena where inherited meanings are continually renegotiated.

3. Scholarly Engagement and Research Context

Scholarly engagement with the *Mahabharata* has historically centered on questions of dharma, kingship, cosmology, statecraft, and philosophical inquiry. Classical Indological scholarship approached the epic as a civilizational archive—an expansive text containing ethical debate, ritual codes, political theory, and metaphysical reflection (Brockington, 1998; Hiltebeitel, 2001). Later literary criticism extended this focus to narrative architecture, epic temporality, and dialogic multiplicity, recognizing the text as a layered structure of competing moral voices. Within these dominant frameworks, central figures such as Krishna, Arjuna, Bhishma, and Yudhishtira have attracted sustained attention because of their explicit engagement with ethical dilemma and metaphysical discourse.

By contrast, Shakuni—though narratively pivotal—has received comparatively limited sustained scholarly examination. Traditional commentaries and devotional interpretations frequently frame him as catalyst of *adharma*, the architect of deceit whose manipulation precipitates the disastrous Game of Dice. His psychological formation remains underexplored; his role is treated as functional rather than interpretive. In such readings, Shakuni operates less as complex subject than as narrative mechanism accelerating dynastic collapse.

This scholarly marginalization parallels his simplification in popular culture. Modern adaptations, including televised epics such as *Mahabharat* directed by B. R. Chopra (1988–1990), visually encode Shakuni through tropes of suspicion and duplicity. Costume design, performative gesture, vocal tonality, and shadowed cinematography reinforce archetypal villainy. Such representations consolidate his identity as conspirator while rarely granting interior depth. Repetition across media stabilizes stereotype, rendering critical reconsideration less likely.

Nevertheless, late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century scholarship has documented the rise of character-centric myth retellings in Indian English fiction. These narratives revisit epic material from alternative vantage points, foregrounding emotional interiority and structural marginalization (Richman, 2008). Often categorized as revisionist mythography, such works challenge canonical moral hierarchies by re-centering previously silenced figures. The impulse reflects broader theoretical movements attentive to voice, subjectivity, and narrative authority.

Scholars note that contemporary myth retellings frequently emerge in response to modern concerns regarding identity, gender, caste, justice, and historical memory. By applying feminist, psychoanalytic, or postcolonial frameworks, authors destabilize inherited typologies of hero and villain. Characters once confined to emblematic roles become ethically layered subjects. This shift mirrors theoretical critiques of grand narrative authority and foregrounds the politics of representation (Hutcheon, 1988).

Within this revisionist terrain, certain epic figures have attracted sustained academic interest. Karna, for instance, has been widely examined as tragic hero shaped by caste exclusion and divided loyalty. Draupadi has generated feminist scholarship exploring humiliation, agency, and embodied resistance. Their reinterpretations in contemporary fiction have produced extensive discourse on subaltern identity and gendered injustice.

In contrast, Shakuni remains comparatively underexamined as primary analytical subject. He appears in discussions of the Game of Dice or Duryodhana's counsel but rarely as focal figure of theoretical inquiry. This absence is significant. Once a character is stabilized as archetypal villain, scholarly interest often shifts elsewhere; moral closure discourages interrogation. Yet this very stabilization reveals a productive research gap. If myth retellings aim to unsettle ethical binaries, then Shakuni's entrenched villainy demands reconsideration.

Shakuni: Master of the Game by Ashutosh Nadkar provides a compelling opportunity to address this lacuna. By re-centering narrative consciousness on Shakuni, the novel invites interdisciplinary analysis. It situates his strategies within contexts of trauma, geopolitical marginalization, and intellectual calculation. Rather than reiterating stereotype, the text foregrounds psychological depth and narrative self-awareness.

Recent scholarship on myth adaptation underscores the interpretive significance of such narrative repositioning. Critics argue that revisionist retellings do not merely reproduce canonical events; they interrogate epistemological authority and expose the contingency of moral labeling (Hutcheon, 1988; Richman, 2008). Granting narrative voice to the villain destabilizes inherited hierarchy and compels reconsideration of ethical assumption.

This study therefore addresses an identifiable research gap by foregrounding Shakuni as psychologically complex and politically situated figure. Rather than treating him as instrumental antagonist, the article situates his characterization within trauma theory, subaltern historiography, and postmodern narrative analysis. By shifting attention from hero-centric frameworks to antagonist interiority, the study expands critical discourse on epic reinterpretation and demonstrates the theoretical potential of re-reading villainous figures within contemporary mythography.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis grounded in interpretative literary methodology. The objective is not to reconstruct historical fact but to examine how narrative strategies reshape ethical perception. Rather than verifying epic events, the analysis investigates how characterization, focalization, and symbolic construction alter moral evaluation. The methodology proceeds through four interrelated components designed to ensure analytical depth and theoretical coherence.

4.1. Close Reading of Nadkar's Novel

The primary analytical focus is a sustained close reading of *Shakuni: Master of the Game*. Close reading permits careful attention to narrative voice, focalization, imagery, symbolic patterning, and rhetorical structure. Particular emphasis is placed on: The depiction of imprisonment and starvation as formative psychic rupture; The symbolic function of Shakuni's limp as embodied memory; The representation of the Game of Dice as psychological theatre and strategic maneuver; The tonal register of narration—confessional, justificatory, reflective, or self-aware.

By attending to diction, narrative pacing, and structural emphasis, the study identifies how the novel constructs Shakuni's subjectivity and reframes his moral status. Close reading also considers narrative silences and ambiguities, recognizing that indeterminacy is central to postmodern reinterpretation. What remains unsaid or partially articulated becomes analytically significant.

4.2. Comparative Engagement with Canonical Episodes

Although the analysis prioritizes Nadkar's retelling, it incorporates selective comparison with canonical episodes from the *Mahabharata* (Brockington, 1998; Hiltebeitel, 2001). This comparative dimension does not measure fidelity; instead, it identifies shifts in narrative emphasis and ethical framing.

Episodes examined comparatively include: Gandhari's marriage to Dhritarashtra and its diplomatic implications; The imprisonment of the Gandhara royal family as elaborated in later traditions; The Game of Dice and its immediate moral aftermath; Shakuni's advisory role within Duryodhana's political strategy.

Through juxtaposition, the study highlights how perspective reshapes moral meaning. Events peripheral in the epic assume centrality in the novel; actions previously stabilized as deviant become ethically contested. The aim is interpretive contrast rather than textual adjudication.

4.3. Application of Interdisciplinary Theoretical Frameworks

The analytical lens integrates trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001), subaltern studies (Guha, 1982; Spivak, 1988), and postmodern narrative theory (Hutcheon, 1988; Lyotard, 1984). These frameworks are not imposed abstractly but applied to specific textual moments.

- Trauma theory elucidates Shakuni's obsessive revenge as manifestation of unresolved psychic injury.
- Subaltern studies contextualizes Gandhara's marginalization within imperial power dynamics.
- Postmodern narrative theory examines how focalization destabilizes moral certainty and multiplies interpretive possibilities.

This interdisciplinary synthesis ensures that character analysis remains theoretically grounded rather than impressionistic. Each framework illuminates distinct dimensions—psychological, political, and epistemological—while collectively reinforcing analytical coherence.

4.4. Contextualization within Contemporary Myth Retellings

The study situates Nadkar's novel within the broader trajectory of contemporary Indian myth reinterpretation. By recognizing recurring

patterns of revisionist mythography—particularly the humanization of antagonistic figures—the methodology frames Shakuni's reconfiguration as part of a wider literary movement.

This contextual layer identifies thematic continuities, including: Recovery of marginalized voices; Interrogation of dharmic absolutism; Exploration of trauma and historical grievance; Rejection of binary moral structures.

Such positioning prevents the analysis from treating the novel as isolated creative act and instead locates it within evolving cultural discourse

5. Interpretative Orientation

The methodological orientation remains interpretative rather than historical. The study does not attempt to authenticate epic events or reconstruct ancient geopolitical realities. Its focus lies in narrative construction, symbolic design, thematic development, and ethical framing within Nadkar's text. Meaning is treated as product of storytelling strategies rather than documentary accuracy.

This approach aligns with contemporary literary scholarship that understands myth as dynamic narrative discourse rather than static scripture (Hutcheon, 1988). By combining close textual analysis with interdisciplinary theoretical engagement, the methodology advances beyond descriptive summary toward critical interpretation.

Shakuni thus becomes analytical site where trauma, marginality, and narrative power converge. The study aims to demonstrate that his character is neither reducible to archetypal villain nor simplistically rehabilitated victim, but complex figure shaped by historical injury, strategic intellect, and narrative revision.

6. Main Analysis

6.1. The Origin of Vengeance

Shakuni's transformation from prince to avenger originates not in the dice hall but in the political alliance forged through Gandhari's marriage to Dhritarashtra. Within the Mahabharata, this union is often interpreted as diplomatic

consolidation between Gandhara and Hastinapura (Brockington, 1998). Yet revisionist retellings foreground its coercive undertones, exposing the asymmetrical power relations embedded within matrimonial diplomacy. Identified as Manglik, Gandhari undergoes a ritual marriage prior to wedding Dhritarashtra—a detail that later becomes the pretext for suspicion and humiliation. When this prior ritual is discovered, Dhritarashtra's response—imprisonment of the Gandhara royal family—transforms alliance into betrayal.

In *Shakuni: Master of the Game*, Nadkar intensifies this episode by presenting starvation as systematic annihilation rather than incidental punishment. The imprisonment functions not as disciplinary measure but as slow erasure of lineage. Sustenance is rationed so that only one family member may survive. The father's instruction that Shakuni consume the family's share creates devastating ethical inversion: survival becomes obligation, and obedience demands complicity in collective death. Filial duty compels him to live; moral consciousness burdens him with the knowledge that life is secured through others' extinction.

This moment crystallizes what may be described as an "ethics of revenge." Shakuni's vengeance does not emerge from ambition or envy but from historical grievance compounded by survivor's guilt. Trauma theory identifies such foundational rupture as identity-forming event (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). Catastrophic injury fractures subjectivity and generates obsessive commitment to symbolic restitution. The crippling of Shakuni's leg—whether inflicted as ritual inscription or paternal act—embeds vengeance within the body itself. His limp becomes living archive of humiliation, a corporeal reminder that memory cannot be escaped.

Survival thus transforms into mandate. Shakuni does not initially seek dominion over Hastinapura; he seeks its collapse. This distinction is analytically significant. Power pursued for expansion reflects political ambition; destruction pursued as moral necessity reflects trauma-driven retaliation. Nadkar frames

Shakuni's subsequent strategies as extensions of this formative wound. The prison cell becomes invisible axis around which epic catastrophe rotates.

The ethical complexity deepens when survival is reframed as sacrificial inheritance. Shakuni inherits not throne but grievance. His father's command positions him as vessel of collective memory. Trauma is transmitted intergenerationally, converting private injury into political mission. What begins as filial obedience evolves into ideological commitment. Revenge is no longer emotional impulse but perceived restoration of violated justice.

Importantly, Nadkar does not portray vengeance as irrational frenzy. It is calculated, patient, and deliberate. This rationalization intensifies moral ambiguity. Shakuni's actions are neither spontaneous nor chaotic; they are methodically aligned with long-term retribution. His strategies unfold across years, sustained by disciplined memory rather than impulsive rage.

The prison episode therefore functions as narrative origin of epic destabilization. Without Gandhara's humiliation, the dice hall may never materialize as site of catastrophe. Nadkar reorients causality: Kurukshetra's devastation is traced back to starvation cell rather than gambling board. In doing so, the novel relocates moral responsibility within structures of prior injustice.

Yet this reframing does not absolve Shakuni. Trauma explains but does not sanctify. His commitment to annihilation ultimately extends suffering beyond initial grievance. The desire to avenge lineage becomes willingness to sacrifice generations. Vengeance, once ethically justified as response to humiliation, evolves into consuming logic indifferent to collateral devastation.

Thus the origin of vengeance in Nadkar's narrative reveals dual movement: psychic injury generates strategic resolve, and strategic resolve escalates into catastrophic design. Shakuni emerges as figure forged in deprivation, carrying embodied memory into corridors of imperial power. The prison cell remains the unseen

beginning of war—a reminder that epic catastrophe often germinates within neglected histories of humiliation.

6.2. Strategic Intelligence as Weapon

Unlike Bhima or Arjuna, whose authority derives from physical prowess and martial skill, Shakuni's primary instrument is calculation. His power is neither corporeal nor institutional but cognitive. Nadkar's portrayal foregrounds strategic acuity as compensatory force: deprived of military dominance and sovereign command, Shakuni mobilizes intellect as weapon. His conspiracies reveal disciplined psychological insight rather than impulsive malice.

He identifies Bhima's appetite as exploitable vulnerability, transforming excess into opportunity for elimination. He recognizes Duryodhana's insecurity vis-à-vis the Pandavas and cultivates it into enduring political hostility. He understands Yudhishtira's attachment to gambling not merely as pastime but as structural weakness capable of destabilizing dynastic legitimacy. Each intervention demonstrates acute reading of character. Shakuni does not manufacture flaws; he amplifies those already present.

The Lakshagriha episode—where the Pandavas are invited to inhabit a palace constructed of flammable materials—exemplifies long-range strategic design. Though the scheme ultimately fails due to Vidura's foresight, its conception reveals preference for indirect warfare. Shakuni avoids overt confrontation, favoring engineered circumstance over battlefield engagement. Violence is mediated through architecture, hospitality, and ceremony rather than open combat. Such strategy reflects asymmetric logic: when direct power is unavailable, manipulation of context becomes primary tactic.

This reliance on intellect complicates moral classification. Intelligence, as faculty, is ethically neutral; its moral value depends upon application. The epic tradition acknowledges Shakuni's brilliance even while condemning his methods. Nadkar intensifies this paradox. His Shakuni is rarely impulsive; he deliberates, anticipates, and

calculates. Patience becomes as decisive as cunning. Memory of humiliation sustains discipline, preventing rash action and reinforcing long-term design.

His mentorship of Duryodhana illustrates strategic layering. Rather than merely corrupting the Kuru prince, Shakuni cultivates him as conduit of revenge. Duryodhana's resentment is not imposed but structured and refined. Shakuni provides ideological coherence to diffuse grievance, translating insecurity into political project. The relationship thus oscillates between guidance and instrumentalization. Affection and manipulation coexist, blurring ethical boundaries.

Moreover, Shakuni's intelligence operates performatively. He crafts persona of eccentric gambler and mischievous uncle, masking strategic depth beneath theatrical ambiguity. This self-fashioning allows him to maneuver within courtly space without immediate detection. His apparent marginality becomes camouflage. By underestimating him, adversaries facilitate his schemes. Strategic invisibility becomes tactical advantage.

Recognition of his acuity by opponents further destabilizes caricature. Even those aligned against him concede his formidable intellect. Such acknowledgment prevents reduction to stereotype. The villain is not irrational or incompetent; he is methodical and perceptive. His eventual defeat therefore carries tragic dimension: it extinguishes not merely conspirator but calculating mind of rare precision.

Yet intelligence does not mitigate destructiveness. Strategic brilliance accelerates catastrophe. By weaponizing psychological insight, Shakuni transforms private grievance into systemic destabilization. His schemes expose fragility within Kuru polity—ambition, envy, procedural rigidity—but they also intensify those fractures. The very skill that elevates him ensures expansive ruin.

Thus, strategic intelligence in Nadkar's narrative functions as both empowerment and curse. It compensates for geopolitical marginalization while magnifying ethical transgression. Shakuni's

mind becomes battlefield where trauma is translated into design. Calculation replaces sword, and cognition substitutes for army. In this transformation, intellect itself becomes instrument of vengeance—precise, disciplined, and devastating

6.3. The Game of Dice: Illusion and Catastrophe

The Game of Dice constitutes the epic's decisive rupture, the moment at which latent tensions crystallize into irreversible fracture. In many traditional narrations of the Mahabharata, Shakuni fashions dice from his father's bones, imbuing them with supernatural obedience. This mythic embellishment amplifies his aura of dark enchantment, transforming calculated strategy into occult determinism. Nadkar's retelling rationalizes this element by substituting ivory dice for enchanted relics, thereby shifting emphasis from magic to manipulation. Fate yields to intellect; sorcery dissolves into psychological engineering.

The game reveals structural fragilities within the Kuru court. Yudhishtira's acceptance of the invitation derives not from coercion at sword-point but from adherence to kshatriya protocol and personal susceptibility to gambling. His wagers escalate through pride and procedural obligation. Draupadi's humiliation exposes ethical paralysis within the assembly: elders who might intervene—Bhishma, Drona, Dhritarashtra—remain constrained by legalistic interpretation of royal code. The spectacle becomes indictment not only of Shakuni's cunning but of institutional complicity. Silence becomes participation.

Shakuni's orchestration is meticulous. He calibrates each wager, ensuring incremental escalation from wealth to sovereignty, from sovereignty to personhood. Yet his agency operates within pre-existing vulnerabilities. He does not invent Yudhishtira's weakness, Duryodhana's envy, or courtly rigidity; he exploits them. Catastrophe emerges through convergence of ambition, pride, addiction, resentment, and procedural formalism.

Responsibility diffuses across actors rather than resting singularly upon architect.

Nadkar's Shakuni anticipates the aftermath. He understands that humiliation will not culminate in submission but in war. His triumph is therefore paradoxical. Victory in the dice hall initiates destruction of the very polity within which he operates. The game functions as ritual culmination of trauma: starvation's helplessness is inverted into spectacle of control. Where deprivation once dictated survival, calculated abundance now dictates downfall. The symbolic reversal is complete.

The episode dramatizes illusion at multiple levels. Dice appear to determine fate, yet human decisions govern trajectory. Yudhishtira chooses to wager repeatedly; Duryodhana chooses escalation; Dhritarashtra chooses delayed intervention; the elders choose interpretive restraint. Shakuni manipulates probabilities but does not suspend agency. The illusion of inevitability obscures distributed culpability. By rationalizing the dice's material composition, Nadkar underscores that catastrophe is humanly constructed rather than cosmically ordained.

The humiliation of Draupadi marks ethical nadir. Her interrogation of assembly—questioning whether a man who has lost himself may wager his wife—exposes fragility of legalistic dharma. The court's inability to respond reveals moral exhaustion at epic's core. Shakuni's strategy succeeds because the system is already compromised. His cunning accelerates decay but does not originate it.

Importantly, Nadkar reframes the dice hall not merely as site of deception but as theatre of political revelation. Beneath ritualized civility lies unresolved rivalry and suppressed resentment. The spectacle forces concealed antagonisms into visibility. Shakuni acts as catalyst exposing contradictions embedded within dynastic order. The game thus becomes microcosm of epic conflict: public ceremony masking private grievance.

By stripping supernatural determinism from the event, the novel emphasizes contingency. War does not erupt from divine script but from cumulative human misjudgment. Shakuni's agency remains central yet relational. He is architect of circumstance, not sole author of ruin. The dice hall becomes nexus where trauma, ambition, and institutional failure intersect.

Through this reframing, Nadkar transforms the Game of Dice from episode of singular villainy into complex tableau of shared ethical collapse. Illusion resides not only in dice but in belief that catastrophe requires one culprit. The spectacle reveals deeper truth: empires fall not merely through manipulation but through vulnerabilities they refuse to confront.

6.4. Love and Emotional Complexity

Despite his calculated cruelty, Shakuni's emotional attachments complicate any reduction to cold villainy. Nadkar's portrayal foregrounds relational depth, particularly in his bond with Gandhari. His loyalty toward his sister exceeds political alliance; it is protective and wounded. Gandhari's blindfold, conventionally interpreted as emblem of wifely devotion, acquires alternative resonance as silent protest against coerced destiny. Shakuni reads her gesture not as submission but as symbolic indictment of Hastinapura's authority. His resentment intensifies not solely from geopolitical grievance but from perceived injustice inflicted upon familial dignity.

This protective impulse extends to Duryodhana. Their relationship oscillates between mentorship, affection, and strategic cultivation. Shakuni occupies a surrogate paternal role within the Kuru court, offering Duryodhana affirmation absent from elder statesmen who privilege Pandava legitimacy. He validates the prince's grievances, translating emotional insecurity into ideological conviction. Affection and manipulation intertwine; care becomes instrument, and instrument becomes care. The boundary between guidance and exploitation remains deliberately unstable.

Shakuni's decision to remain in Hastinapura rather than govern Gandhara further illuminates emotional contradiction. By relinquishing direct responsibility to his homeland, he prioritizes proximity to Gandhari and influence over Duryodhana. This choice signals devotion but also ethical ambiguity. Loyalty to family supersedes obligation to state. In pursuing vengeance, he neglects constructive stewardship. His identity becomes increasingly tethered to retribution rather than governance.

Nadkar intensifies this tension by granting Shakuni moments of reflective awareness. He recognizes that the strategies he engineers will ultimately consume those he claims to protect. War threatens Gandhari's sons as much as Pandavas. Yet he persists. Revenge evolves from filial duty into compulsive imperative. Love does not dissolve vengeance; it coexists with it. Emotional attachment fails to moderate destructive design.

This coexistence produces tragic density. Shakuni is capable of tenderness and cruelty within the same moral frame. He grieves, remembers, calculates, and strategizes without relinquishing affection. His emotional life does not absolve him; rather, it intensifies contradiction. The more he loves, the more catastrophic his loyalty becomes. Devotion fuels devastation.

Importantly, Nadkar avoids sentimental rehabilitation. Shakuni's love does not redeem his actions, nor does it erase conscious alignment with annihilation. Instead, emotional complexity renders him ethically unsettled. He is neither affectless conspirator nor misunderstood martyr. He inhabits paradox: protector who destroys, brother who sacrifices nations for familial memory, mentor who guides disciple toward ruin.

In the novel's later reflections, Shakuni anticipates inevitable devastation with unsettling composure. Self-awareness heightens tragedy. He understands the scale of destruction yet remains committed to its realization. Trauma has transformed affection into accelerant. Love, once grounding force, becomes tether binding him to irreversible path.

Thus Nadkar restores to Shakuni an interiority long suppressed by archetype. Emotional complexity destabilizes binary moral categorization. His cruelty is deliberate, yet it is not devoid of feeling. His loyalty is genuine, yet it is ethically catastrophic. By juxtaposing affection and annihilation, the narrative deepens psychological realism and underscores epic's resistance to moral simplification.

Shakuni emerges not as unfeeling architect of chaos but as figure whose attachments intensify rather than mitigate his destructiveness. In this tension between love and vengeance lies the core of his tragic ambiguity.

7. Comparative Perspective

Shakuni's reinterpretation participates in a broader trajectory within Indian English myth retellings, where characters traditionally confined to antagonistic roles are reimagined through frameworks of marginalization, psychological depth, and ethical ambiguity. Figures such as Karna and Draupadi have been extensively revisited in contemporary fiction and scholarship. Karna is frequently interpreted as tragic hero shaped by caste exclusion and divided allegiance, while Draupadi has attracted feminist re-readings foregrounding agency, humiliation, and embodied resistance. These reinterpretations destabilize epic moral hierarchies by situating character within structural injustice rather than immutable typology.

Yet Shakuni occupies a distinct position within this revisionist landscape. Unlike Karna, whose tragedy emerges from concealed lineage and constrained loyalty, or Draupadi, whose suffering arises from patriarchal violence, Shakuni consciously aligns himself with destructive design. His tragedy lies not in ignorance or imposed subordination but in deliberate embrace of annihilation. He acts with awareness of consequence. This self-conscious participation intensifies ethical complexity. If Karna embodies tragic loyalty and Draupadi tragic resilience, Shakuni represents tragic calculation.

This distinction positions him uniquely within myth revisionism. He cannot be recuperated as

innocent victim nor celebrated as heroic martyr. Instead, he becomes exemplar of how trauma, agency, and intellect converge in morally ambivalent form. His villainy is neither absolute nor accidental; it is strategic and self-aware. Such characterization complicates attempts to categorize him within conventional frameworks of redemption or condemnation.

Comparative resonance may also be drawn beyond Indian epic tradition. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton presents Satan as rhetorically compelling rebel whose defiance arises from wounded pride and refusal of subordination (Milton, 1667/2008). Satan's charisma unsettles readers; his psychological depth complicates theological absolutism. Like Shakuni, Milton's Satan articulates grievance against perceived injustice and mobilizes intellect as instrument of resistance. Both figures exhibit strategic brilliance and self-awareness, transforming injury into rebellion.

The comparison does not equate moral universes but underscores shared literary impulse: interrogation of villainy through interiority rather than caricature. Milton's Satan famously declares, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven" (Milton, 1667/2008, Book I), articulating preference for autonomy over subjugation. Shakuni's posture reflects analogous refusal of humiliation. In both cases, rebellion emerges from perceived marginalization within hierarchical order.

Yet divergence is equally instructive. Satan's rebellion aspires to rival divine sovereignty; Shakuni seeks not alternative empire but destruction of perceived oppressor. His objective is not dominion but retributive equilibrium. Where Milton's Satan imagines counter-kingdom, Shakuni imagines collapse. This distinction reinforces his tragic orientation toward annihilation rather than rule.

Such cross-cultural comparison situates Shakuni within global narrative pattern in which antagonists are re-examined as psychologically layered subjects. Modern literature increasingly interrogates fixed moral typologies, recognizing that destructive agency often emerges from

structural grievance rather than metaphysical evil. By aligning Shakuni with this broader tradition, Nadkar's retelling transcends regional myth adaptation and participates in universal literary revaluation of villainy.

Thus, Shakuni's reinterpretation exemplifies convergence of epic revisionism and comparative literary ethics. He remains architect of catastrophe, yet his interiority compels analytical engagement rather than reflex condemnation. In positioning him alongside other reimagined antagonists, the novel underscores enduring narrative truth: villainy is rarely singular or simplistic; it is historically situated, psychologically mediated, and narratively constructed.

8. Conclusion

Shakuni: Master of the Game reconfigures one of the most vilified figures of the Mahabharata into a psychologically layered and politically situated subject. Through the lens of trauma theory, Shakuni's vengeance emerges as response to humiliation, dispossession, and survivor's guilt rather than intrinsic malevolence (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). Subaltern studies further situates his strategies within asymmetrical power relations, reframing his cunning as adaptive negotiation within imperial hierarchy (Guha, 1982; Spivak, 1988). Postmodern myth revisionism destabilizes inherited moral binaries, exposing villainy as narrative construction shaped by perspective and authority (Hutcheon, 1988; Lyotard, 1984).

Shakuni thus occupies an ethically unsettled space. He is neither pure victim nor unambiguous villain. He is intellectual strategist forged through trauma, bound by familial loyalty, and consumed by retaliatory purpose. His agency is deliberate; he acts with awareness of consequence. Yet his destructiveness originates within systemic humiliation rather than metaphysical depravity.

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This dual recognition complicates moral evaluation without erasing accountability.

Nadkar's retelling refuses both exoneration and reduction. It neither sanctifies Shakuni nor confines him to archetype. Instead, it restores to him interiority long effaced by pedagogical simplification and popular stereotype. The novel demonstrates that epic antagonists may embody structural grievance as much as individual malice. By granting narrative voice to the marginalized conspirator, it reveals how moral categories emerge through narrative centralization.

At a broader level, this reinterpretation contributes to contemporary mythographical discourse in Indian English literature. Modern retellings do not merely reproduce epic material; they interrogate it, exposing fissures within inherited ethical architecture. The Mahabharata endures precisely because it accommodates such reinterpretive elasticity (Hiltebeitel, 2001). Its characters resist definitive closure, remaining open to theoretical re-engagement across generations.

Shakuni's transformation from archetypal deceiver to psychologically complex strategist exemplifies this elasticity. His story reveals how trauma, marginalization, and strategic intellect converge within epic narrative. Catastrophe in Kurukshetra does not originate solely in villainous intent but in accumulated grievance, institutional fragility, and collective ethical failure.

Ultimately, the novel invites readers to confront a disquieting insight: villains are often forged within structures of exclusion and imbalance. To humanize Shakuni is not to absolve him but to recognize the historical and psychological conditions that shape destructive agency. In doing so, Nadkar reopens ethical inquiry within epic tradition and affirms myth as dynamic site of interpretive negotiation rather than fixed moral decree.

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10. Author Declaration

We, the authors, hereby declare that this manuscript is our original work and has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere, either in whole or in part. All sources used in this work have been appropriately acknowledged and cited.

We further declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this work.