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MORAL CLARITY AND MORAL CONFLICT IN THE SHIVA TRILOGY AND THE ARYAVARTA CHRONICLES

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of moral conflict and moral clarity in Amish Tripathi's The Shiva Trilogy and Krishna Udayasankar's The Aryavarta Chronicles. Focusing on characterization, familial duty, social hierarchy, gendered power, and ethical choice, the study uses close reading and Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development as a supporting interpretive lens. The analysis shows that both series question rigid moral codes when social rules conflict with individual conscience and responsibility. Sati, Partha, Shiva, Bhishma, Yudhisthir, Daksha, and Panchali represent different responses to such conflicts. The novels ultimately frame moral clarity as reflective judgment rather than unquestioning obedience.

Keywords: *Characterization, Duty, Indian Myth-Fiction, Moral Clarity, Moral Conflict*

INTRODUCTION

Literary narratives frequently represent morality not as a fixed set of rules but as a field of conflict in which characters must negotiate duty, desire, social expectations, and personal responsibility. This tension is particularly visible in contemporary Indian myth-fiction, where inherited epic narratives are reworked through modern literary techniques and humanised characterization. Amish Tripathi's The Shiva Trilogy and Krishna Udayasankar's The Aryavarta Chronicles revisit mythological and epic materials while placing their characters in situations where established codes of conduct are tested by changing social and political circumstances.

Moral philosophy provides a useful background for understanding such conflicts. Aristotle connects ethical conduct with virtue and reason, while Kantian deontology emphasizes the relationship between action and moral rules. Udayakumar and Sunder Singh

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Babu (2021) explain that, from a deontological perspective, an action is considered right when it conforms to moral norms. Lawrence Kohlberg (1975), from a cognitive-developmental perspective, further explains moral judgment as a process through which individuals negotiate competing values. His discussion identifies concerns such as punishment, affection, authority, law, life, liberty, justice, truth, and sexuality as possible sources of moral conflict.

These perspectives are relevant to the two literary works because their characters repeatedly confront conflicts between inherited rules and the consequences of following or rejecting those rules. In The Shiva Trilogy, the moral order associated with Lord Ram becomes a major source of social stability but also creates rigid distinctions, including the treatment of Vikarma and the conflict between the Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis. In The Aryavarta Chronicles, divine law, political authority, family obligation, and social hierarchy similarly shape the choices of Bhishma, Yudhisthir, Partha, Panchali, and Govinda Shauri.

Previous scholarship has examined mythological, cultural, philosophical, and ethical dimensions of these works. Arivika and Latha (2026), for example, discuss moral consciousness and moral predicaments in Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy, particularly through the choices of Shiva and Sati. Scholarship on the Mahabharata has also explored dharma, kingship, suffering, and ethical decision-making (Hudson, 2013; Malhotra, 2020; McGrath, 2017). However, the comparative representation of moral conflict across Tripathi's and Udayasankar's myth-fiction, especially through characterization and the interaction between social rules and individual agency, remains less developed.

This study therefore examines how the two literary series represent characters who negotiate moral conflict between familial duty, social order, political responsibility, and individual conscience. Rather than treating Kohlberg's theory as a system for classifying characters, the study uses it as a supporting lens for interpreting moments of moral reasoning within the narratives. The study contributes to literary discussion by showing how contemporary myth-fiction transforms inherited moral codes into narrative conflicts that expose the limitations of rigid obedience and foreground reflective choice. The study addresses the following question: How do The Shiva Trilogy and The Aryavarta Chronicles

represent moral conflict and the development of moral clarity through characterization, social hierarchy, familial duty, and individual choice?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative literary approach based on close reading and comparative textual analysis. The primary texts are Amish Tripathi's The Immortals of Meluha (2010), The Secret of the Nagas (2012), and The Oath of the Vayuputras (2013), collectively referred to as The Shiva Trilogy, and Krishna Udayasankar's Govinda (2012), Kaurava (2013), and Kurukshetra (2015), collectively referred to as The Aryavarta Chronicles. The analysis focuses on passages in which characters confront conflicts involving familial obligation, social hierarchy, political responsibility, gendered power, law, and individual conscience. Particular attention is given to the characterization of Shiva, Sati, Daksha, Parvateshwar, Partha, Bhishma, Yudhisthir, Panchali, and Govinda Shauri. Secondary sources on moral philosophy, moral cognition, dharma, and epic ethics are used to contextualize the interpretation. The primary analytical procedure consists of four stages. First, relevant scenes and character decisions are identified through repeated close reading. Second, each scene is examined in relation to characterization, narrative conflict, dialogue, internal motivation, and social context. Third, recurring patterns are compared across the two literary series. Finally, Kohlberg's (1975) account of moral reasoning is used selectively to clarify how obedience, conformity, social order, and reflective judgment operate within particular scenes. The study does not diagnose the characters psychologically; instead, psychological concepts function as supplementary interpretive vocabulary for literary analysis.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The *Shiva Trilogy* by Amish Tripathi narrates the heroic tale of the protagonist Shiva rising from a tribal leader to a legend. In Hindu mythology, Shiva is a widely worshipped God. He is called the destroyer of evil. In the *Shiva Trilogy*, Shiva is humanised. He performs heroic actions, destroys evil, and revives civilisation. *The Aryavarta Chronicles* is a

reconceptualised version of the great epic *The Mahabharata*. The epic teaches about duty and honour. *The Aryavarta Chronicles* is a fictional, demythologising version of *The Mahabharata*.

Moral principles for the people of the *Shiva Trilogy* are rules, laws and ideology laid down by Lord Ram, the predecessor to the current emperor Daksha. Shiva observes in *The Immortals of Meluha* that Meluha "was an empire ruled by clearly codified and just laws, to which every Meluhan was subordinated, including the emperor" (Tripathi, 2010, p. 35). There are two groups of people, namely the Suryavanshis and the Chandravanshis. The Suryavanshis are strict followers of the rules, while the Chandravanshis are liberal with strict adherence to the codified rules of Lord Ram. In *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, moral principles are divine laws passed down by the gods. People like Bhishma and Yudhisthir are gatekeepers of the divine law.

These strict followers of law are often challenged to make moral choices. There is a difference between being upright and doing the right thing. This is when these characters are facing a moral dilemma. Lawrence Kohlberg lists ten "moral values or issues of concern" (p.2) that lead to dilemmas. These include "Punishment, Property, Roles and concerns of affection, Roles and concerns of authority, Law, Life, Liberty, Distributive justice, Truth, Sex" (Kohlberg 1975, p.3). He states, "A moral choice involves choosing between these values as they *conflict* in concrete situation of choice" (Kohlberg 1975, p.3). Dilemmas arise when people have to determine what is valuable and why. The characters from the *Shiva Trilogy* and *The Aryavarta Chronicles* are conflicted about breaking conventional ethics. Some characters are compelled to choose between family and duty.

In the *Shiva Trilogy* and *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, there are characters like first generation minor characters like Bhisma, Daksha, and Parvateshwar who are aware of their moral duties and live by them. They resist any changes that are against their moral code of conduct and ultimately face their downfall. They also witness the destruction of their mediated morals. There are people like Sati and Partha who are willing to bend the laws for the greater good. In the *Shiva Trilogy* and *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, Shiva and Govinda Shauri are leaders who are aware of moral laws. They guide people to do right action within

the moral system. They also teach people to break the laws that constrain them from doing their duty.

In the novel *Kurukshetra*, during the Kurukshetra war, Partha faces existential anguish and is distraught to wage war against his uncle Bishma, his guru, and his brothers. Partha was conflicted between moral values and a sense of duty. Partha was confronted with a hard choice: to wage war against his family, whom he grew up with. Augusto Blasi (1983) in the article "*Moral Cognition and Moral Action: A Theoretical Perspective"* contends that knowledge and reasoning enable "rational activity" (p. 6). By doing so, "rational beliefs can become reasons for action, precisely because they are considered to be true by the agent" (Blasi 1983, p. 6). Govinda Shauri advises Partha to forsake his dilemma and perform his duty as a Kshatriya. Thus, Govinda Shauri helps Partha understand his duties and aids him in combating his relatives in the Kurukshetra war without attachment.

Similarly, in the novel *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, Sati's father Daksha refuse to heed to Shiva and accept Somras as evil. He refuses to take responsibility for the outrage happened in the past due to Somras. Sati, when she learns of her father's misdeeds, is willing to let go of her strict ethical principles and fight for the right cause. Sati is an immortal in the *Shiva Trilogy*. For centuries, she adhered to the Suryavanshi's law. She lived a life as Vikarma (untouchable), accepting it as her fate. Sati's choice can be understood through "*The punishment-and-obedience orientation*." (Kohlberg 1975, p.3), where "punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority" (Kohlberg 1975, p.3), through three stages. Sati's actions align with the second stage, "*heteronomous stage*, where the right was literal obedience to rules and an equation of obligation with submission to power and punishment" (Kohlberg 1975, p.2). For centuries, Sati followed the rituals to remedy Vikarma, like visiting the temple and performing shudhikaran, a purification ceremony. She was made to believe in this oppressive practice through fear and punishment. This was practised to gain authority over the individual.

In the novel *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, learns of her father's misdeeds in colluding with Vidyunmalli to raise a rebellion; she stands up against him, rushes to save Nandi and the people fighting the war and sacrifices her life to save them. Partha and Sati are caught

between familial dilemmas and moral values. Parth overcomes his dilemma by seeking guidance from Govinda Shauri. Sati, on the other hand, acts according to her conscience and prevails over her dilemma.

Yudhisthir and Daksha are symbols of hegemony. Daksha hides his moral desires behind the façade of fatherly love, while Yudhisthir behind righteousness and duty. Sati and Panchali are caught in a power struggle, deciding their choices. Initially, both are voiceless in asserting their struggle. Both are trapped in a web of social structure. Sati is doubly marginalised, enduring social exclusion as a Vikarma, subject to oppression and untouchability for generations. For Sati, going against her father Daksha is to rebel against the hierarchical system. However, she understands the moral clarity, faces the odds to confront her father and bravely faces her heroic death. For Panchali, her pain is revealed through her inner voice. She voices the injustice she faces but is unable to act to free herself from the clutches of the patriarchal system, like Sati. Her pain and sufferings are often overlooked. However, she becomes the anchor to bring about change in civilisation.

The *Shiva Trilogy* confronts how moral duty affects personal choices. Lawrence Kholeberg, in "*The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education*", states a psychological perspective on how moral choices are regarded by human beings wherein "morality is conceived as an internalization of the arbitrary rules of parents and culture, since such acceptance must be based on affection and respect for parents as authorities rather than on rational nature of the rules involved." (p.7) In *The Secret of the Nagas*, Parvateshwar faces a moral dilemma about marrying the love of his life. In the novel, Parvateshwar's grandfather, Lord Satyadhwaj rebelled against the unfair Maika practice. In this system, adoption is relaxed for noble families. Satyadhwaj wanted an equal system for all. So, he vowed that he and his descendants would not have children. Vowing to the oath made by his forefathers, Parvateshwar followed the Suryavanshis' laws "'unquestionable and unchanging'" (Tripathi, 2012, p. 253) throughout his life. He refuses to marry Aanandmayi despite loving her. Parvateshwar's choice is largely based on cultural implications and his parents' choice rather than his own. Shiva pacifies Parvateshwar's apprehension and advises him to break the laws if required and marry Anandmayi. So, for the first time, Parvateshwar breaks the law, heeds Shiva's advice and marries Anandmayi.

The Aryavarta Chronicles and the *Shiva Trilogy* showcase the subtle paradox of disciplined morals. In the novel *Govinda,* Bhishma vows his life to celibacy when Satya, consort of Shantanu, desires her lineage on the Kuru throne. Bhishma is a man of virtue and righteousness. He does not forsake his dharma to marry Amba because of the promise he made to his father, Shantanu. Bhisma does not abstain from his moral grounds even in a crisis. As a result, Bhishma witnesses the downfall of his lineage and his death. Bhishma's reason to follow disciplined and principled life is to maintain peace and stability through social hierarchy. In Kurukshetra war, he sides with the Kauravas claiming that Syoddhan is the legitimate son of Dhritrashtra and he has rightful claim to rule Kuru than Yudhishthir who was born through surrogacy. He is not against surrogacy but hierarchy by which he declares Syoddhan as rightful heir as eldest son of Kuru dynasty. He decides to support the Kauravas for this very reason despite their wrong doings. His action to support the wrongdoers is reason for his fall. He does not want to forsake his contentious attribute. His Duty-bound attitude led him to his death bed in Kurukshetra.

Two poignant instances in *The Aryavarta Chronicles* where choice is questioned. One is when Yudhisthir chose to marry Draupadi and during the Game of Dice. In *The Mahabharata,* Shakuni and Duryodhana deliberately invite Yudhisthir to play the Game of Dice to acquire Indraprastha from him. Despite everyone stopping Yudhishthir, he pays no heed and participates in the game of dice. Shakuni and Duryodhana are aware that Yudhistir has little knowledge of the dice game and does not know how to play. So, they deceive him in the Game of Dice to confiscate his kingdom in the name of Dharma.

Yudhisthir wagers everything, hoping to retrieve what he lost. As Hudson (2013), in the book *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering in The Mahābhārata* notes the words of Darupadi, Yudhisthir "was bewildered (*mūdha*) and maddened (*matta*) by his passion (*mada*)" (p. 93). In Krishna Udayasankar's novel *Kaurava,* Syoddhan notes that Yudhisthir is intoxicated by gambling to win. In the epic *The Mahabharata*, Yudhistir's choice to play the Game of Dice is his moral and ethical code. However, in *The Aryavarta Chronicles,* Yudhisthir willingly gambles everything, driven by ambition. Udaysankar portrays the human flaw rather than justifying it as moral conduct.

In the novel *Govinda,* Partha wins Panchali's hand in the Swayamvar. He consents to his elder brother Dharma marrying Panchali. Dharma urges his brothers to follow the social norms in which the elder brother marries before the younger brothers. Panchali do not have a voice in the decision to marry Dharma. She unquestionably accepts her fate and marries him. However, internally, Panchali laments her forsaken state. She is remorseful and helpless, caught in a web of moral drama.

Krishna Udaysankar's Yudhisthir is a sharp critique of the original *Mahabharata*. The author critiques the dominating nature of Yudhisthir through his inner voice. In *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, Yudhisthir is not entitled to moral conflict in marrying Panchali, unlike in the epic *The Mahabharata*. He declared his moral right to marry Panchali, and Partha agrees with Yudhisthir. Krishna Udayasankar reveals Yudhisthir's intention to marry Panchali: "To Dharma, she was a symbol of sin, of all that he longed to be free of. Including Politics" (Udayasankar, 2015, p. 115). He hoped that marrying Draupadi would liberate him from his duty as the older son by allowing him to become the king of Kuru. He enters into a political marriage with Draupadi, hoping for strong political allies in his journey to become the monarch of Kuru. To Yudhithir, marrying Panchali is his duty as an Arya, as a righteous king. To marry Panchali and play the Game of Dice is Yudhisthir's personal choice. Kohlberg, 1975 in *The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education* explains this as maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the order, and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it. (p.3)

To play the Game of Dice is Yudhistir's ambition to regain his lost glory and has little to do with righteousness. The marriage to Panchali confronts the lack of consent and respect for personal boundaries and choices. In *The Aryavarta Chronicles,* Yudhisthir is often burdened while fulfilling his moral responsibility. Yudhisthir builds a utopian nation, Indraprastha and rules as an ideal king. He accepts the honour as King of Indraprastha because it is his moral duty as an Arya and eldest son of Pandu. He wishes to build a divine order on earth, which is an ideal nation. His character faces a constant tussle between

domination and responsibility. Born as the eldest son, Dharma gives up his desires and free will to serve his nation and people. Dharma is bound by duty as well as feels the burden of seeking it; as Syoddhan points out the predicament of Yudhisthir as, “Dharma continued to wear the cloak of high nobility and eschewed all conflicts … a man who kept honour within and valour without, at the cost of gaining reputation for neither.” (Udayasankar, 2012, p.117). Yudhisthir always tries to be the better person and follower of moral and ethical values. Kohlberg (1975), in his article “*The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education*” calls it “The interpersonal concordance or "good boy − nice girl" orientation” (p.3). His actions are largely driven by the desire to please as a principled being. His actions are personal rather than for the common welfare, as he claims.

Daksha also undergoes this orientation. In the *Shiva Trilogy*, not only morality but blind parental love also teases at moral and ethical degradation. In *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, King Daksha recollects a flashback of his choice to stay or leave Meluha. He was constantly criticised by his father Brahmanayak. Once, he and Parvateshwar saved sixteen-year-old Sati from a pack of dogs. Daksha was injured in the process. Brahmanayak criticises Daksha as an incompetent warrior. Daksha and Veerni decide to leave the tyrant family and build a peaceful life in Panchavanti. However, Sati looks up to Brahmanyak as an ideal father and king. She questions Daksha, “‘Why can’t you be more like grandfather’” (Tripathi 2017, p. 537). This question made Daksha rethink his decision and decide to stay and become the ideal father and king that his daughter desired. In this process, he eventually lost consciousness of right and wrong, becoming a martinet. He chose his duty over family and became morally debased. King Daksha’s fatherly love sparked Daksha to become a better father and an ideal king. Neither Yudhisthir nor Daksha resolve their cognitive dissonance. When given a choice between moral duty and parental love, Daksha chooses moral duty over parental love.

In the novel *The Oath of the Vayuputra*, he conspires against Shiva and his supporters unable to accept his deceit. When Sati meets Daksha for a final peace talk, she learns about her father hiring assassins to kill supporters of Shiva. They also kill Khanakala who decides to side with Shiva. Sati decides to save Nandi despite Daksha stopping her. She tries to reason out Daksha’s wrongdoings. But Daksha deny it. Sati decides to break the barriers and

fight for right cause, on the other hand Daksha's long-standing ideal is broken. Daksha wanted to become a better father. He believed rules and hierarchy aided him to maintain his ideal image. But his very ideal became the reason for his downfall. Sati followed rules all her life because the system she lived in demanded it. However, in the end, she breaks free from the constraints through moral reasoning.

In *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, Yudhisthir is portrayed as egoistic and authoritative. His actions and his authority are not to be questioned. "As far as Dharma was concerned, to doubt his merits to rule was to doubt the notion of Divine order itself" (Udayasankar, 2015, p. 31). Kevin McGrath (2017), in the book *Rāja Yudhiṣṭhira: Kingship in Epic Mahabharata*, calls Krishna "an archaic polity or janapada" (p. 23). He further notes Narada's remark calling him "*saṅghamukhyo'si* (you are leader of an association)" (p. 24). Further, he critiques that "Kṛṣṇa and of Yudhiṣṭhira tend towards this form of a dominant type of polity" (p. 24). *The Mahabharata* showcases Yudhistir caught in an ethical and moral dilemma. Sometimes, his choices display a paradoxical standpoint as opposed to his attribute as a person who follows the moral code of conduct.

Panchali's marriage and her humiliation during the Game of Dice made her question the moral principles that were devised to protect human beings. Yudhisthir's conscious decision to marry her for a political ally and stay silent during her humiliation in the Game of Dice spurred war. Panchali was abandoned by law and family to uphold righteousness. However, Govinda Shauri plays a strategic role in the Kurukshetra war to avenge everyone who humiliated Panchali in the Game of Dice. Thus, Govinda Shauri upholds moral justice and triumphs over depravity and injustice to women.

The *Shiva Trilogy* questions blind faith towards moral codes. The novels braces consequences of making wrong choices. The rule-sticklers do not forsake their faith until the end of the novel. When given a choice, they choose to die in repentance. In the novel *The Oath of Vayuputras,* when Shiva decides to destroy Devagri using Pashupatiastra, all the citizens except the Kshatriyas and the Brahmins involved in the creation and support of Somras were evacuated. However, many choose to stay and die because the foundation of their life, "Lord Ram's sacred law has been broken" (Tripathi, 2013, p. 507). King Daksha, who lived his life following the laws of Lord Ram, was consumed by rules. Like Bhisma,

Daksha witnesses the death of his beloved daughter Sati and the destruction of his ideal empire. At the end of the novel, he laments his choices.

In the novel *Kurukshetra* from *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, Dwaipaniya and Govinda Shauri discuss the need for the Kurukshetra war. Dwaipaniya questions people sacrificing themselves in war. Their conversation underpins "Utilitarian overtones" (Kohlberg 1975, p. 3) which "emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (Kohlberg 1975, p. 3). Govinda Shauri explains to Dwaipaniya that the crumbling of the system, loss of compassion and divided moral values are the reasons for war. Govinda Shauri explains to Dwaipaniya, "You, of all people, understand the principle that thousands of lives are a worthy sacrifice for the greater good of Aryavarta" (*Udayasankar,2015, p. 101*). Govinda Shauri in *The Aryavarta Chronicles* promises a better future by destroying the very system that was the pinnacle of civilisation.

Shiva makes similar choice in *The Oath of Vayuputra*. Shiva, upon realising the real evil, advises the Meluhans to leave the attachment towards Somras. The Meluhans instead chose to rebel and kill Sati. Shiva here chooses to use Pashupati Astra, a banned Astra, to destroy the city of Meluha and the people who were supporting the cause of Somras. Here, Shiva makes a hard moral choice to fulfil his duty as a leader: to destroy evil. "Right Behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintain the given social order for its own sake" (Kohlberg 1975, p. 3). The *Shiva Trilogy* and *The Aryavarta Chronicles* teach us to make hard choices during the time of crisis. Since the beginning of the novel, Shiva is conflicted about understanding good and evil. As Neelkanth, he was obliged to destroy evil. In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva believed that the Chandravanshis were evil. He, however, understands that their way of life is different and they are not evil. In *The Secret of the Nagas*, he thought the Nagas were evil. He, however, realises their plight as a marginalised community. Shiva fulfils his duty as Neelkanth to destroy evil and restore balance.

As Bhishma in the novel *Kaurava* states, "'morality is a subtle thing, and what is considered moral often depends on the situation. Laws are crafted so that we may live noble, honourable lives (Udayasankar 2015, p. 129). In the *Shiva Trilogy* and *The Aryavarta Chronicles*, understands choices and dilemma through social, biological and behavioural

patterns. In the novels, following rules and laws is compelling. Everyone in the novels has their moral reasoning for their right and wrong actions. The novels find excruciating consequences for wrong choices. The novel underpins an important lesson for human beings to be flexible in making a choice when confronted with moral conflicts.

Discussion

1. Moral Conflict and Characterization

Both literary series construct moral conflict through characters whose identities are strongly connected to inherited systems of law and duty. In The Shiva Trilogy, Meluha is presented as an empire governed by codified laws, and Shiva observes that the laws apply even to the emperor (Tripathi, 2010). The statement establishes law as a central feature of the narrative world. Yet the narrative repeatedly complicates the apparent justice of that system by showing its consequences for individuals who do not fit its categories.

Sati provides one of the clearest examples. As a Vikarma, she accepts social exclusion and purification rituals for years because the system presents these practices as morally legitimate. Her later confrontation with Daksha changes the meaning of obedience. She no longer evaluates an action simply according to whether it follows an established rule; instead, she considers whether the rule produces justice. Kohlberg's (1975) discussion of obedience and authority helps illuminate this movement from rule-based conformity toward more reflective judgment. Literarily, however, the significance lies in the transformation of Sati's characterization: the formerly compliant figure becomes an agent who evaluates the moral legitimacy of the system itself.

Partha in The Aryavarta Chronicles faces a different but related conflict. During the Kurukshetra war, he is torn between familial affection and his responsibility as a warrior. Govinda Shauri's guidance allows him to reinterpret duty not as personal hostility toward his relatives but as responsibility within a larger social conflict. The scene therefore externalizes an internal moral conflict through dialogue between characters. Blasi's (1983) emphasis on reasoning as a basis for action is useful here because Partha's decision emerges through reflection rather than simple obedience.The two examples establish a recurring pattern: moral conflict is represented through characterization rather than abstract philosophical exposition.

Sati and Partha become significant because their choices reveal the instability of apparently absolute moral categories.

2. Familial Duty, Individual Agency, and Social Order

The novels repeatedly place family relationships in tension with individual agency. In The Secret of the Nagas, Parvateshwar refuses to marry Anandmayi because of an inherited vow associated with his family. The oath, described as 'unquestionable and unchanging' (Tripathi, 2012, p. 253), becomes a symbol of inherited obligation. His eventual decision to marry Anandmayi after Shiva's intervention marks a change in his relationship with tradition. The scene is not simply a rejection of duty; rather, it demonstrates that inherited duty can be reconsidered when it prevents an individual from acting according to present circumstances. A comparable conflict appears in The Aryavarta Chronicles through Bhishma. His commitment to his vow and to social hierarchy prevents him from reconsidering his position even when the consequences become destructive. His support for the Kauravas is represented as an extension of his commitment to dynastic order. The tragedy of Bhishma therefore emerges from the gap between personal virtue and the consequences of rigid adherence to a principle. His characterization complicates the assumption that a character who follows a moral code is necessarily acting morally.

Yudhisthir presents an even more complex case. His public identity is constructed around dharma, righteousness, and political responsibility, yet his decisions in marriage and gambling reveal the possibility that moral language can conceal personal ambition. Udayasankar's representation of Yudhisthir therefore shifts the reader's attention from what the character claims to what his choices reveal. This distinction is important for literary interpretation because characterization is produced through the tension between self-image, narration, dialogue, and action. The contrast between Parvateshwar, Bhishma, and Yudhisthir suggests that the two series do not simply oppose tradition and freedom. Instead, they explore degrees of agency within systems of obligation. The narrative question becomes whether duty is meaningful when an individual no longer examines the consequences of obeying it.

3. Law, Dharma, and Narrative Conflict

Law and dharma function as major sources of narrative conflict in both works. In The Shiva Trilogy, Lord Ram's laws are initially represented as the foundation of an ordered

civilization. However, the conflict between Suryavanshi orthodoxy and alternative ways of living exposes the limitations of a system that treats its categories as permanent. Shiva's own development is therefore a process of reinterpreting the moral map of Meluha. He initially accepts the opposition between good and evil, but his encounters with the Chandravanshis and Nagas gradually reveal that social difference does not automatically signify moral corruption. The Aryavarta Chronicles similarly transforms dharma from a stable principle into a contested narrative concept. Yudhisthir's political authority is associated with righteousness, yet his actions demonstrate that righteousness can become a language of domination. The Game of Dice is especially significant because Yudhisthir continues to participate even when the consequences are visible. The narrative thereby separates the rhetoric of dharma from ethical responsibility.

The contrast between the two series is particularly evident in their treatment of moral flexibility. Govinda Shauri argues that a deteriorating social system may require radical intervention, while Shiva eventually accepts that the destruction of an established order may be necessary to prevent greater harm. Kohlberg's (1975) discussion of changing rules according to social utility provides a useful interpretive framework for these moments. Nevertheless, the literary significance lies in the narrative paradox: the characters must violate or transform an existing order in order to pursue what they understand as a larger form of justice.

4. Female Agency and the Representation of Patriarchy

Gendered power is another important dimension of moral conflict. Sati and Panchali are positioned within social structures in which male authority determines the boundaries of their lives. Sati's status as a Vikarma demonstrates how institutional rules can transform social prejudice into a supposedly legitimate moral system. Her eventual resistance to Daksha therefore has both personal and structural significance. She does not merely reject her father; she challenges the hierarchy that gives him authority over her moral choices. Panchali's characterization in The Aryavarta Chronicles similarly exposes the limitations of a system that claims to protect social order. Her marriage is determined without meaningful consent, while her humiliation during the Game of Dice reveals the failure of the supposedly righteous men around her to protect her dignity. The narrative gives importance to her inner voice,

allowing readers to perceive the distance between public declarations of dharma and the lived experience of a woman subjected to patriarchal authority.

The comparison between Sati and Panchali demonstrates two different forms of agency. Sati's agency becomes increasingly external and confrontational, culminating in direct action against her father's political and moral decisions. Panchali's agency is more strongly represented through voice, consciousness, and the symbolic consequences of her treatment. In both cases, however, female characterization exposes the contradiction between moral systems that claim to preserve justice and social practices that reproduce domination. This dimension strengthens the literary contribution of the study because moral conflict is not only an abstract cognitive process. It is embodied in characters whose social positions determine which choices are available to them and whose voices are heard within the narrative.

5. Moral Transformation and the Representation of Choice

The most significant pattern across the two series is the movement from unquestioned certainty toward reflective judgment. Shiva's development illustrates this transformation. Initially, he accepts inherited assumptions about who constitutes good and evil. His encounters with the Chandravanshis and Nagas gradually challenge these assumptions. The resulting transformation is not simply a change in opinion; it is a change in the way he interprets moral categories. Sati undergoes a parallel transformation. Her early obedience is shaped by social expectations and fear of punishment, whereas her later decisions are based on her own assessment of injustice. Partha similarly moves from paralysis to action after reconsidering the relationship between family and duty. These characters are therefore not presented as morally perfect. Their significance comes from their capacity to reconsider inherited assumptions.

In contrast, Daksha and Bhishma illustrate the destructive consequences of moral rigidity. Daksha's desire to become an ideal father and ruler gradually turns into authoritarianism. Bhishma's commitment to hierarchy prevents him from responding adequately to the injustice produced by the political order he supports. Their tragedies demonstrate that moral certainty can become destructive when a principle is separated from its consequences.

Yudhisthir occupies an especially ambiguous position. His public identity as a righteous ruler coexists with actions driven by ambition, authority, and personal desire. Udayasankar's version of the character is significant because it exposes the human limitations behind the epic label of 'Dharma.' The result is a more complex literary representation in which moral identity is continually negotiated rather than permanently possessed.

6. Comparative Interpretation: Moral Clarity as Reflective Choice

The comparative reading shows that both literary series question the assumption that morality is equivalent to obedience. The Shiva Trilogy emphasizes the transformation of a social order through Shiva and Sati, while The Aryavarta Chronicles foregrounds the instability of dharma through Yudhisthir, Bhishma, Panchali, Partha, and Govinda Shauri. Although their narrative settings differ, both series use moral conflict to expose the gap between rules and justice. The two series also differ in how moral clarity is achieved. In The Shiva Trilogy, moral clarity frequently emerges through direct confrontation with the consequences of social rules. Sati's experience as a Vikarma and Shiva's encounters with marginalized communities force characters to reconsider inherited classifications. In The Aryavarta Chronicles, moral ambiguity is intensified through political motives and competing interpretations of dharma. Govinda Shauri often functions as a dialogic catalyst who helps other characters reinterpret their obligations.

Kohlberg's (1975) framework is useful in identifying movements from obedience and conformity toward more reflective forms of moral judgment. However, the literary texts cannot be reduced to stages of moral development. Characters often occupy contradictory positions, and their decisions are shaped by narrative context, political interests, gender, family, and social hierarchy. The theory therefore works best as a secondary lens that supports, rather than determines, literary interpretation. Overall, the novels represent moral clarity as the ability to reconsider inherited rules in relation to human consequences. Their characters achieve insight not because they abandon duty, but because they distinguish between the formal authority of a rule and the ethical responsibility to act justly. This distinction is central to the novels' revision of epic and mythological material.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how The Shiva Trilogy and The Aryavarta Chronicles represent moral conflict and moral clarity through characterization, familial duty, social hierarchy, gendered power, and individual choice. The analysis demonstrates that both literary series transform inherited moral systems into narrative conflicts in which characters must decide whether to obey, reinterpret, or resist established rules. The comparison shows three major patterns. First, characters such as Parvateshwar, Bhishma, and Daksha illustrate the limitations of rigid adherence to inherited principles when those principles produce harmful consequences. Second, Sati, Partha, and Shiva demonstrate forms of moral transformation in which inherited assumptions are reconsidered through experience, reasoning, and confrontation with injustice. Third, Panchali and Sati reveal how gendered power exposes contradictions between proclaimed moral order and lived social reality. Kohlberg's theory helps explain different forms of moral reasoning, particularly obedience, conformity, social order, and reflective judgment. Nevertheless, the literary analysis indicates that moral development in these narratives cannot be reduced to a linear psychological progression. Moral choices are shaped by characterization, narrative conflict, social position, political circumstances, and the consequences represented within the story.

The central contribution of the two works is therefore their representation of moral clarity as reflective choice. Both challenge the idea that following a rule is automatically equivalent to doing what is right. Through their reinterpretation of epic and mythological figures, the novels invite readers to examine how duty, authority, family, and justice interact when established moral systems are placed under pressure.

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