

# Analysis Of Jungian Archetypes in Select Reinterpreted Mythopoeic Novels of Anand Neelakantan

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**Abstract**—Jungian archetypes are timeless patterns of the psyche found in the collective unconscious represented in stories, fables, and cultural narratives across cultures. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reinterpretations of these archetypes in literature reveal an evolving cultural consciousness that desires to humanize mythic figures and represents a dualistic lens of good and evil. This paper investigates how archetypal figures are reinterpreted in Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* and the *Ajaya* series (*Ajaya: Roll of the Dice and Rise of Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata*). Neelakantan employs the narratives of the Indian epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* from the viewpoint of Ravana and Duryodhana, respectively. It also challenges normative mythic structure and restructures the archetypes of the 'villain' and the 'hero.' The study analyzes how these reinterpreted characters represent archetypes like the Shadow, the Outcast, and the Tragic Hero, underlining the cultural and psychological aspects of their inner challenges. These narratives reveal trauma of alienation, the burden of fate, and the quest for self-actualization, which highlight the notion that archetypal energies can be both destructive and transformative. By combining Jungian psychology with mythic reinterpretation, this paper argues that Neelakantan's works serve as contemporary mythopoeic texts. Further it provides insight into the modern Indian collective psyche while redefining myth as a living, evolving narrative capable of communicating the complexities of the human condition in the contemporary era.

**Index Terms**—Jungian Archetypes, Ravana, Duryodhana, Mythmaking, Anand Neelakantan.

Mythologies of India, for ages, have embraced subjects of cultural, spiritual, and psychological value as a representative of human experiences, mental states, and moral dilemmas. Terry Eagleton defines myth thus the way in which what we say and believe connects with the power structure and power relations of the society we live in not simply the deeply

entrenched often unconscious beliefs held, but rather more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving, believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power. (10, 15)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mythological stories are no longer only for educational or religious reasons. Modern writers are reimagining these original tales to investigate psychological depth, ethical complexity, and cultural depth. A central part of this reimagining is the use of Jungian archetypes or universal patterns embedded in the collective unconscious and expressed by characters, themes, and structures in a fictional narrative form. The recent efforts of modern-day writers, such as Anand Neelakantan, to retell myths, represent a fusion of the traditional and modern. "It is not out that the Indian fiction scene is going through a generational change where the audience is finally shedding colonial influences and the idea of capitalist superiority. Whatever the intentions of the readers and writers, we can take hope from the fact that these current retellings allow us to reclaim a Hinduism that is pluralistic and diverse" (Singh 175).

The modern critiques incorporate topics of identity, social privilege, and psychological depth, intentionally blending cultural themes with contemporary issues. Jungian archetypes, the universal or storytelling symbols to which the persona connects through the collective unconscious, can supply a framework for understanding these retellings. "These internal models, shaped by our genetic factors and experiences, are crucial in driving complex behaviors by integrating sensory information over time and facilitating long-term planning to reach subjective goals" (João Eireiras Vedor).

Anand Neelakantan's novels, such as *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* and *Ajaya* series (*Ajaya: Roll of the Dice and Rise of Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata*) provide deep re-imaginings of Indian mythological stories, with viewpoints that contest typical treatments of the epics. A key component of Neelakantan's telling is his sympathetic portrayal of characters especially the villains', Ravana, Duryodhana. By showcasing their psychological struggles, Neelakantan depicts these characters as psychologically complex beings. This allows for utilizing Jungian psychological archetypes to study the human psyche in mythic narratives. This study seeks to draw inferences from Neelakandan's fiction to consider how the archetypes influence character construction and facilitate representations of cultural and psychological tensions. Neelakandan intentionally builds insightful experiences based on universal human experiences. Further, the study examines the ways in which Neelakandan integrates modern critiques of myth and to demonstrate that the timeless, mythic structure is rooted in psychological and social realities.

Anand Neelakandan reclaims and reinterprets established Indian mythology not simply by retelling old stories, but by transforming them to suit contemporary social and psychological concerns. He retains the central elements of the original myths such as superhuman figures, heroic journeys, and moral dilemmas, while recreating their identity and gender hegemony to emphasise social justice by highlighting emotional nuances. Neelakandan, reinvents marginalized characters by granting agency and voices to muted characters. Though he adds modern perspectives to ancient tales, he still preserves the symbolic and cultural significance of the original stories.

Carl Jung (1875–1961) introduced the ideas of the collective unconscious and archetypes, as universal symbols that have power over what people feel, think, and write. Archetypes are repetitive patterns of phenomena that occur, or reoccur, across cultures and literary narratives. More significant archetypes are The Hero-courage, growth, and self-hood, The Shadow- repressed desires or fears of society, The Wise Old Man or Woman- wisdom and guidance, and The Anima or Animus- the inner feminine or masculine self.

Jungian archetypes as universal symbols within literature describe experiences and perceptions that largely appeal to the collective unconscious. "The contents of the collective unconscious, on the other hand, are known as *archetypes*." (Jung 4). According to Carl Jung, humans possess these archetypes as part of our collective unconscious and define them as recurring symbolic figures and motifs within cultures and myths. By delineating these archetypes within literature, scholars can explore psychological depth of characters and universal patterns which create a narrative during the retelling of the myth, revealing that myths respond to fundamental human experience and inner conflict.

This dissertation explores Anand Neelakandan's novels by applying Jungian archetypes to analyse the development of character, shedding light on cultural and psychological conflict, and providing connections to the universal aspect of human nature. By incorporating Jungian archetypal figures such as the Hero, Shadow, and Wise Mentor into his stories, Neelakandan expresses how characters change and evolve by overcoming challenges, grappling with moral conundrums, or wrestling with their own identity. The archetypes Neelakandan uses symbolically represent larger societal and psychological tensions, capturing themes such as oppression, identity, and moral choice. In doing so, his retellings couple mythological stories with culturally universal themes of humanity, enabling the reader to connect with the journey of the characters and the symbolic power of the myths.

In mythopoeic literature, both cultural truth and personal truth are explored. Scholars such as Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye argue that archetypes play a central a role in mythic storytelling, as universal, cultural patterns that may structure narrative and psychologically resonate with readers. "Myths carry one message, which reflects the psychic unity of humankind" (Oziewicz). In the Indian literary context, authors like Anand Neelakandan and contemporaries retell older stories or epics, as authors create narratives for contemporary sensibilities, and still hold on to the mythic and symbolic power of the stories. Thus, Jungian archetypes are ideal ways of discussing character development, narrative structure, and thematic meaning in these retellings.

In the epic *Ramayana*, Ravana is generally depicted as the archetype of arrogance, lust, and evil, a ten-headed demon king who openly violates divine law by abducting Sita and resisting Ram, an incarnation of dharma. His vast powers, knowledge, and devotion to Shiva do not outweigh his moral corruption, from a literary perspective. Ravana reveals the inevitable pattern of triumph of virtue over arrogance and chaos. However, in Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, this traditional interpretation is challenged. Through Ravana's voice, Neelakantan allows the defeated to narrate the story. Ravana is presented as the reigning monarch of superior intellect and vision whose flaws arise from mere human deeds, not because he was evil by nature. The myth has become a psychological and socio-political narrative, where Ravana symbolizes resistance, individuality, and the complexity of human morality. Therefore, while Valmiki's *Ramayana* keeps Ravana as the villain, Neelakantan's retelling returns Ravana's story as that of a misunderstood hero, blurring the lines between moral and immoral.

I have always found that the villains are more believable and humane than our mythological heroes a Ravana or Duryodhana looks refreshingly modern in their values. Their naked materialism, honest ambitions and even their flaws make them likeable. There are two sides to any story. So far, we have been spoon fed one point of view only. It is fascinating to see how the same story changes when the viewpoint changes. As they say, there is my truth, and your truth, but the real truth is somewhere in between." (S Devika, 5)

Neelakantan's protagonists often embody the Hero archetype, putting them through quests and challenges like ancient acoustics found within stories of myth. In *Asura, Tale of the Vanquished*, Ravana is characterized as a tragic Hero, not merely an antagonist, as he undergoes moral and spiritual challenges. Even as a child he always had deeper awareness of differences with his father for holding 'Asura' behavior. But he does possess an individuality and is aware of other people's thoughts and behaviors. We never strayed from the path of righteousness. Our sense of justice differed from what the learned and privileged considered right. We decided our righteousness, and we defined our rights in our own way. We learned that the truth could be bent to suit one's needs. Our dharma was based on simple things:

a man should be true to his word; he should speak from his heart, and he shouldn't do anything he considered wrong. One should not cheat even if one is sure to fail. One should honour women and not insult anyone. If there was injustice, we had to fight it at all costs. We never knew any of the great teachings of the ancient Asura or Deva saints. We followed no tradition. We were almost bastards. (Neelakantan, *Asura Tale of the Vanquished* 16,17)

The Anima archetype also informs Ravana's journey through the women in his life, especially Mandodari and Sita. The women act as reflections of his psyche and reveal his weaknesses and morality conflicts. Mandodari is a reflection of wisdom and restraint, who helps modulate Ravana's impulses, and Sita is a symbol of the unattainable ideal that forms his hubris and eventual demise. From Jung's perspective, these engagements articulate the tension between Ravana's conscious ego and unconscious drives, expressed via the Anima as Sita curses, "what do you know about Deva culture?" "Women are worshipped as goddesses. Our world is a far cry from yours. Here, women have no morals. They move around uncovered. Men and women mix freely, and there is no sanctity to marriage in your kingdom. Your women are loud. They drink and dance with men. Your world is uncouth, with women marrying men of their choice instead of being obedient daughters to their fathers. Your women are pretentious and think they are the most intelligent creatures in the world. You are just creatures of pleasure. Your men are like women. (Neelakantan, *Asura Tale of the Vanquished* 436)

The archetype of the Shadow in Jungian psychology refers to the unconscious part of the psyche that is denied or ignored by the conscious ego, including negative attributes like pride, obsession, or irrational desires. "The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself" (Jung et al.284). In Neelakantan's depiction of Ravana, these Shadow traits are expressively revealed in his hubris, pursuit of power, and hasty behaviors that ultimately separate him from both the guidance of his father and collaborative agreements with his colleagues, while introducing an inner conflict throughout the story. She had hit me—in front of my ministers and my servants—and now the story would spread through the country like wildfire—a king who walked in the

shadow of his mother's pallu. a king who was treated like a baby by his mother...I grabbed my mother by her hair and dragged her out of the hall. The horror of the crime I had committed hit me like a thunderbolt. I was both shocked and shattered, but in some corner of my mind, I was satisfied and happy. (Neelakantan, *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* 174,175)

Though he exhibits brilliance, intelligence and wit, it is his refusal to face or embrace the darker side of himself which splinters his own morality and psychological make-up. The Shadow is both the origin of his tragic flaws and acts as an awareness towards aspects of the self that remain unconscious, yet deeply influential in creating one's fate. "Persona and shadow are usually more or less exact opposites of one another, and yet they are as close as twins" (Stein 109). Ravana is empathetic for making such a wrong decision that unfortunately leads to his demise. The novel provides an opportunity for the reader to justify his decisions as a more complex character instead of branding him as a mere antagonist.

In the epic *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana is normally depicted as the unbearable and jealous villain, whose quest for power and refusal to give the Pandavas a single needlepoint of land precipitates the catastrophic events. He personifies the destructive aspects of ambition and pride and his friendship with Karna is often viewed as unwanted loyalty overcome by resentment and ego. In this orthodox telling, Duryodhana personifies adharma, the state of moral disarray that stands against the righteousness of the Pandavas. However, in Anand Neelakantan's reimagining *Ajaya* series, Duryodhana is cast in an entirely different light. Neelakantan re-casts him as Suyodhana, an otherwise just and benevolent ruler who contests social inequality and the rigid caste hierarchy supported by the Pandavas. "One of the meanings of Duryodhana is 'one' difficult to conquer, in the other words, *Ajaya* (Unconquerable). Though named Suyodhana, the Pandavas used the derogatory 'Dur' to slander him as 'one who does not know how to wield power or arms'" (Neelakantan, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* 8).

The point of view provided through Suyodhana shifts the narrative from moral tyranny to ethical ambiguity, seeing him as a visionary seeking equality and dignity for all. His contempt for tradition, often denoted as arrogance in the epic, becomes in Neelakantan's legend a measure of social disobedience and rational

dissent. Neelakantan's narrative re-humanizes Suyodhana as a tragic hero caught in a sphere of fate and social injustice, revealing his courage, empathy and leadership. Even though Vyasa's *Mahabharata* depicts him as a representation of greed and moral failure, in Neelakantan's interpretation *Ajaya*, he is reimagined as a misunderstood reformer and a moral challenger contesting the victor's claims to sole authority over truth and righteousness.

Thus, in Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya* series, Duryodhana is portrayed not simply as the antagonist of the *Mahabharata*, but a many-layered complex character whose life can be analyzed in terms of the Jungian archetypes. In this respect, from the outset, Duryodhana identifies with the Hero archetype, though perhaps not in an orthodox sense. The individual is brave, desirous of power, and intensely loyal to his kin and particularly to the Kauravas. He is not a good-living hero; however, his heroic energy is obscured by the shadow, which manifests itself through envy and hostility to the Pandavas. He always justifies his aggression and the defense he has made over the years to engage in aggressive moral failings in the name of justice. This view of being more righteous and worthy than the Pandavas becomes a psychological pressure for Duryodhana to resolve his ambivalence and find peace in conflicted emotions. Duryodhana says to Krishna in his deathbed, "They died for me, Krishna for they believed dharma was on my side. Your people died for me, Yadava. Think about that and then consider the dharma you preach" (Neelakantan, *Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata* 434).

The Shadow within him manifests as envy, insecurity, and resentment of the Pandavas; all the unconscious drives that precipitate much of the conflict in the epic. Duryodhana's character is largely informed by the Shadow in his psychology. He is grappling with inadequacy, perpetual comparison to his cousins, and the sense of being denied the lawful place in the palace.

Turning to Yudhishtira the Brahmin said, "You are going to be the next King. You say how we should deal with this rascal. Let me see what my brother-in-law, Kripa, has taught you." Eyes wide with surprise, Suyodhana quickly slid down the slope towards the commotion as his siblings followed. Something Drona had said to Yudhishtira jarred Suyodhana's mind: 'next

King'. 'How can Yudhishtira be the next King of Hastinapura? I am the eldest son of the reigning King, Dhritarashtra,' wondered the young Prince. 'Uncle Pandu ruled on my father's behalf because of his blindness. That does not mean Pandu's son becomes the next ruler of Hastinapura when the time comes.' (Neelakantan, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* 33)

These disowned experiences lead him to act in ways that violate his personhood and harm others, despite his considerable intelligence and strategic brilliance. Neelakantan suggests that Duryodhana doesn't know the limitations of the Shadow, but he is cognizant of some of these impulses as Pitamaha Bhishma advises him, "You were plotting murder for fun? Bhima is your cousin. Both of you are equal in my eyes. It is good to have competitive spirit as Kshatriyas, but not murderous rage" (Neelakantan, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* 77). Nevertheless, he cannot embrace personal autonomy and address these disowned aspects of his experience, suggesting, in a Jungian perspective, the Shadow will at some point act with force and potency when one disowns things.

Duryodhana's contextual relationship with a variety of characters like Jara, Eklavya, and most notably with Karna, reflects both the Anima and Wise Mentor archetypes as he states, "I feel angry at the system and traditions that keep them living like that. I feel irritated that they do not wake up and fight. But I admire their resilience. I admire how they still manage to make a living out of nothing. I am frustrated that I cannot do anything about it and saddened to see so many live in misery in my land" (Neelakantan, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* 135). Karna represents the possibility of ethical integrity and personal growth that Duryodhana repetitively fails to engage with and reach out to. As said, people ignore the fact While listening that leads to misinterpretation. (Chamundeswari 3673). However, the differential tension created between deceits of relationship (loyalty) with unintegrated Shadow constructs prevents these experiences in Duryodhana from reaching a level approaching greater ego autonomy and wholeness. "The occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration, and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression" (Dollard et al., 11). Every Successful story, the key factor is listening to get the information to the brain.

Duryodhana displays the Hero archetype or can be distinguished as that part of biological evolution that is rooted in his desire to rule and lead and serve the Kaurava kingdom with morality. "Suyodhana addressed the group of Brahmins, saying, "What I am about to do is in the exalted traditions of the Vedas." "I wish to call for a real Brahmin, one who understands the scriptures as they were written" (Neelakantan, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* 261). This explains his egalitarian principles and showcases his sense of responsibility and leadership. He mistakenly attains higher levels of consciousness in this archetype. As he disowned his ego, his status and pride interfered with his identity as the King. Though he remained aligned with integrity, which at times brings conflict and eventually results in downfall, allowing corruption of the King archetype to layer over the disowned components of the Shadow that Duryodhana has yet to face and own.

Neelakantan's engagement with Jungian archetypes does more than reveal psychological mapping but it reconceptualizes the meaning of a myth. By demonstrating how inner turmoil, the unconscious mind, and moral ambivalence condition a character's decision-making process, the novels set epic plots within a psychologically and socially complex framework. Characters stop being mere monolithic symbols of good or evil and instead become living representations of archetypal tension, reflecting the struggles, aspirations, and moral ambiguity of the human condition as Duryodhana was attempting to prove his dominance and worth even at deathbed as he says to his friends, "It is over. Dharma has won" (Neelakantan, *Kali: Duryodhana's Mahabharata* 435). This account of archetypal characterization re-orientates with trauma theoretical engagements, as it demonstrates even the most established narratives often downplay suffering and complexity. Neelakantan's retellings, like trauma narratives, articulate divergent points of view and conflicts, while also emphasizing what is rendered silent, thus compelling the reader to confront mythos in a critically reflective and empathetic manner. Similarly, there is an opportunity for Jungian archetypes to create a pathway between individual and collective consciousness. The internal struggles of Ravana and Duryodhana provide a touchstone to recognize human universal experiences of ambition, jealousy, ethical dilemmas, and loyalty. Jungian archetypes reference

these patterns in a mythic stage so that contemporary readers can engage with the narratives of traditionally marginalized or villainous characters. By integrating Jungian archetypes, Neelakantan creates spaces for re-imagining morality, justice, and heroism.

Reading myth through archetypes acknowledges the twenty-first century's multiverse and globalized condition, suggesting that stable binaries of good or evil or hero or villain are more easily challenged. Archetypes show the author where authorial myth can be re-imagined. Structural myth holds ambiguity or empathy into an empathetic cause and consequence complexity about being human yet allow narratives to still feel timeless and durable across the cultural, social, and political aspects of our lives. The durability of myth has always rested with its flexibility, and Jungian archetypes provide a movement of the discussion between timeless human preoccupations and modern sensibilities in the twenty-first century.

In conclusion, Jungian archetypes in the twenty-first century novel are valuable means for psychological analysis, moral examination, and cultural critiques. By recycling and re-imagining classical narratives, an author humanizes the classical 'villain,' into an anti-hero. The discussion of moral and ethical ambiguity becomes an exercise of rationality, and ultimately not only engages but entertains the reader in the battle of unadorned self-conscious ideals and eternally suppressed unconscious lived ideals. Additionally, this re-imagining makes those myths both relevant for contemporary society and smart reality check. Hence, archetypal patterns remain valid filaments through which one can contrast various human behaviors.

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