

# Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics

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—Kalamandalam Mohan Krishnan, senior Kathakali artiste, Kerala.

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—Dr. Vinod Vyasulu, President, Centre for Budget and Policy Studies, Bangalore.

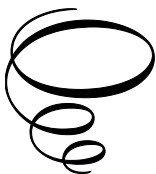
# Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics:

*Comparative Themes  
and Interpretations*

By

Mohan Gopinath and Sabina Zacharias

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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Comparative Themes and Interpretations

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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1541-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1541-3

For Chinnam and my parents - MG

For Pappa, Mummy, Kris and Uday - SZ



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Dr. Mohan Gopinath Ph.D.**

Mohan Gopinath holds a BA (Hons.) degree and a master's degree in English Literature from St. Stephen's College – Delhi University, where he later joined as a member of the faculty. In between, he joined the Indian Police Service which he quit after one week. After the two-year stint in the college, he joined the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and worked as a senior-level banker for almost 21 years in India, the UK and Hong Kong, after initially completing a two-year training attachment in the London branch of the bank. Subsequently, he left the industry and worked for a doctoral degree which he obtained from Osmania University on the topic, Organizational Learning (in the banking industry). His career in HSBC also included an attachment to the all-India HR function.

After obtaining his doctoral degree, Mohan worked as a management consultant in India and the Middle East. He has also worked as a lead consultant for a World Bank-funded Institutional Development Study conducted for the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department.

He reverted to academia after working as a consultant for more than one decade and joined as the Dean of St. Joseph's Institute of Management, Bangalore. He later shifted to the Alliance University's School of Business, Bangalore, where he worked as a Professor in the Department of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource till September 2019. His areas of interest are leadership, management of change, conflict resolution, banking, and protection of the environment. He has written and published papers and case studies across a range of subjects (Banking, Organizational Behavior, Human Resource, Finance, the Environment, and the Performing Arts). He is also a keen tennis enthusiast.

Mohan has conducted Management Development Programs for senior managers in his areas of specialization in the organizational development area in India and the Middle East. His first book was co-authored and titled *Business Drama: How Shakespearean Insights Help Leaders*

*Manage Volatile Contexts*. His interest in Kathakali (he has trained in Kathakali music and sung for many performances) led him to write (in 2015) *The Actor Who Could Connect: the Genius of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair*. This book was selected by the American Library of Congress for inclusion in their database and also exhibited at the Paris World Book Fair in March 2019. The book was later completely revised and expanded and published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle in 2022 under the title, *Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, The Mozart of Kathakali*. His other theme-based book on Kathakali and Shakespeare is *Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirashheela versus the Curtain* also published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2022.

### **Dr. Sabina Zacharias Ph.D.**

Sabina Zacharias has been teaching English Language and Literature, Cultural Studies, Business Communication and Legal English to multicultural / multi-lingual groups at different levels in India and abroad for the last 15 years. She has conducted training sessions and also done content writing for corporate companies. She completed her doctoral degree from the Department of English and Cultural Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) in Hyderabad on the topic 'Re-reading the Legends of Kerala: the politics of legend-making' from a caste and gender perspective and also analysed its representations in film adaptations and fictional narratives. Currently, she is an Adjunct Faculty, teaching Communication and coordinating training courses in English Language and Communication Skills at various B- Schools in Bangalore. Her other interests include reading, volunteering for community service and working on education projects for social change.

### **Professor Edwin Castelino - Editor**

Prof. Edwin Castelino holds an M.Sc. degree in Physics from the University of Mysore and a Post Graduate Diploma in Management from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He worked as a senior manager for the first 20 years in the field of Banking and the next 20 years as an academic in the field of Management. He was the Professor and Dean at the St Joseph's Institute of Management, Bangalore till he retired in October 2018. He has published cases in Management and takes a keen interest in the state of the economy in India and other countries.

## **Books Written by Mohan Gopinath**

Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, the Mozart of Kathakali

Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirasheela versus the Curtain with Vellinezhi Achuthan Kutty, Nagesh Bharadwaj and Asha Prabhakaran

Jim Collins's Leadership Levels Spiced with Shakespeare with Sabina Zacharias and Suprabha Bakshi

Managing Human Foibles and Human Dilemmas

Team Roles: through the Eyes of Shakespeare and Dr. Meredith Belbin

The Myers Briggs Type Indicator: a Shakespearean Validation

Why People Fail: Through the Eyes of Shakespeare and Sumantra Ghoshal

Leadership Nuances in Shakespeare's Plays

Fiction – Double Oh Seven (for private circulation only)

The Actor Who Could Connect: the Genius of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair

(This book was selected by the American Library of Congress for inclusion in their database and exhibited at the Paris International Book Fair in March 2019).

Fiction (novel) – The Intruder – a Nocturnal Interlude

Memoir – Does the Spearmint Lose its Flavor on the Bedpost Overnight?

Business Drama: How Shakespearean insights help leaders manage volatile contexts, with Debashish Sengupta and Ray Titus

## **Books Written/ Edited by Sabina Zacharias**

Edited a book of Essays as part of the National level Essay Contest - Vision India 2022 commemorating the 85th Birth Anniversary of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, IFIM College Bangalore. 2018

Edited a book – Business Ethics – Caselets for the Classroom by Dr. Karanam Nagaraj Rao and CA Sindhuja Bhaskara, Delhi: Bookwell. 2019

Co-authored a book - Jim Collins's Levels of Leadership: a Compilation of Leadership Profiles with Dr. Mohan Gopinath and Dr. Suprabha Bakshi, Chennai: Notion Press. 2021

Published a book chapter - Refiguring History, Historiography and Legend: The Politics of Subversion in Kerala Legends in the book Marginalization in Literature- Critical Perspectives, Edited by Bhaskar Ch Sarkar, Delhi: Authors Press. 2021

Chief Editor for a book - Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirasheela versus the Curtain by Dr. Mohan Gopinath *et al.*, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2022

Editor for a book titled – Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, the Mozart of Kathakali by Dr. Mohan Gopinath, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2022

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this book I owe an immeasurable debt to many people who encouraged us and/or helped by giving critical suggestions and by providing ideas that have vastly contributed to the genesis of this book.

Firstly, there is Professor Dr. Brijraj Singh who first planted the idea of the book and kept my interest and enthusiasm in the project alive and to whom I owe my everlasting love for English literature, and Shakespeare in particular; his classes at St. Stephen's college were truly memorable. Reverend Daniel O'Connor was another person who influenced me greatly and he taught us Chaucer; he has also written the Foreword to this book. Colonel Stephen Pierson of the British Indian Army and later a member of the faculty of English in St. Stephen's had a powerful impact on me and taught me the nuances and the beauties of the language. So it was in Stephen's that the seeds were sown of my love for Shakespeare. I also wish to place on record my indebtedness towards Mr. W.S. Rajpal, the Dean who later became the Principal of St. Stephen's college for giving me my first ever job which was as a member of the faculty of English in the college. Professor S.C. Sircar was the Principal when I joined and I will be in his debt always for taking me as a student and later on confirming my appointment as a member of the faculty.

Professor Edwin Castelino, the former Professor and Dean of St. Joseph's Institute of Management, Bangalore has given freely of his time and given valuable inputs to our manuscripts which improved the quality of the final presentation. Edwin did this willingly and as is his trademark did a meticulous job which greatly assisted in getting the manuscript into shape and ready for the publisher. This is the second time he has come to the aid of the party and we are delighted to have him as the editor of this book.

Mr. Z.K. Peter gave constant encouragement and feedback and was a source of great support. My salaams to him for the interest taken in this project and the inputs given.

Our deepest thanks to Dr. Rajashree Pandiyan who was happy to share the photograph of the Globe Theatre from her private album for the cover of the book. It was indeed kind of her.

A special word of thanks to Uday Pillai who willingly gave his time to designing the cover and also gave inputs and guidance over the course of writing this book which were very appropriate.

This book finally is for all the wonderful people who inhabit the world of Shakespearean theatre and the Kathakali stage and have made these their lifelong vocation; my association with them goes back over seven decades and the primary genesis of the book lies with and in them. My allegiance to this happy breed of men and their world who have devoted all their valuable time and energy to mastering this complex art form. They will always be a part of my life.

**MG**

*Totus mundus agit histrionem —  
“because all the world is a playground”  
—from Petronius a Roman courtier in the time of Nero.*

*“The office of drama is to exercise, possibly to exhaust, human emotions.  
The purpose of comedy is to tickle those emotions into an expression of  
light relief; of tragedy, to wound them and bring the relief of tears.  
Disgust and terror are the other points of the compass.”  
— Sir Laurence Olivier, Actor*

*What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do.  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears.  
Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2*

*I have heard  
That guilty creatures sitting at a play,  
Have, by the very cunning of the scene,  
Been struck so to the soul that presently  
They have proclaim’d their malefactions;  
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak.  
With most miraculous organ.  
Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2*

## SYNCRETIC/SYNETISM

*~ Combining or bringing together different philosophical, religious, or cultural principles and practices.*

*~ Combining different religions, cultures, or ideas.*

The underlying theme of this book is based on what is called a syncretic approach. This approach means that it takes two disparate and seemingly widely separated forms which could be a theme, culture, religion, belief, and so on, and brings them together to reveal similarities. In this particular instance, we have used syncretism to compare two very different things, if 'things' is the right word. These are characters from the plays of Shakespeare and the stories from Kathakali. We have shown how there is much more in common between these characters than would appear to be there at first glance. We have made it clear in the book that we are not forcing the comparisons; the similarities already existed and we have merely brought them into the open. At first, we did not realize the complete depth of the comparisons which was possible and this realization came to us when we started writing the book. It was almost as if some of the Kathakali stories are paying homage to the creations of a playwright who was the greatest of them all. We are not referring here to the authors of the stories but to the stories themselves; it is as if the characters in the stories are looking back over the centuries and seeing characters who lived and died in a completely different milieu and seeing in them portions of their own mental makeup and ways of seeing things and reacting to other people. They would have found in the characters of the plays people who are close to them emotionally and intellectually and so would have made friends with them easily. If the Bard could have watched a Kathakali performance, this fact would surely have struck him and he would have watched the stories being enacted with love and understanding and formed a bond with the authors of the Kathakali stories who brought them to life. And also, the people who tread the boards in a theatre or on a stage have only one aim – to provide enjoyment to the viewers and make the viewers forget the day-to-day travails they are going through at least for a brief period of time.



The approach is indeed syncretic, but even more interesting is the enquiry into what this syncretic approach produces, or results in. We found in rereading the pages an additional realisation emerging: that whatever the cultural, historical, temporal and political distinctions between the different varieties of humanity, ultimately human behavior tends to be uniform if the factors people face are identical across the ages and over vastly varied environments. In other words, your syncretic approach may actually demonstrate a deeper truth: the reality of that old cliché – we're all the same.

We have kept it simple and have put ourselves into the shoes of the reader while writing what may appear to be a complicated book. It is not, and our only wish is for you to understand and enjoy the comparisons – to understand the syncretic parameters which we have explored. We trust you will find the characters take on a different perspective and thereby bring them closer to you.

*“You put together two people who have not been put together before. Sometimes it is like that first attempt to harness a hydrogen balloon to a fire balloon: do you prefer crash and burn, or burn and crash?”*

*But sometimes it works, and something new is made, and the world is changed. Then, at some point, sooner or later, for this reason or that, one of them is taken away. And what is taken away is greater than the sum of what was there. This may not be mathematically possible; but it is emotionally possible.”*

—Julian Barnes, from his putative grief memoir – *Levels of Life*

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Does character develop over time? In novels, of course it does: otherwise there wouldn't be much of a story. But in life? I sometimes wonder. Our attitudes and opinions change, we develop new habits and eccentricities; but that's something different, more like decoration. Perhaps character resembles intelligence, except that the character peaks a little later.*

*Between twenty and thirty, say. And after that we're just stuck with what we've got. We're on our own. If so, that would explain a lot of lives, wouldn't it? And also if this isn't too grand a word - our tragedy.”*

—Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*

## FOREWORD

THE REVEREND DR. DANIEL O'CONNOR,  
CHAPLAIN AND LECTURER, ST STEPHEN'S COLLEGE, DELHI, 1963 -72

My wife and I lived and taught in Delhi for a short decade. In those days we had no opportunity to visit Kerala, and so the great Kathakali tradition was beyond our reach, a thousand miles to the south. We might have occasionally gotten glimpses of India's cultural achievements and diversity, but I do not recall any opportunity to witness Kathakali in the city in those days – nor were there those universal YouTube videos to hand! When Mohan Gopinath came to study in our English Department, I recall that he had already embarked on training in the Kathakali vocal practice and tradition. I do not recall any other student with this background at that time, and it all seemed to us a remote and exotic art. Rooted in distinctive South Indian temple culture, it was as remote to us as if it might have taken place on the moon. We are fortunate, then, that Mohan has brought his lifelong absorption in Kathakali to a wide readership in this interesting book.

Shakespeare, on the other hand, was thoroughly rooted in our College and in Delhi – that memorable indigenizing represented by The Shakespeare Wallah had strong links to the College, and our annual production of a play by the College's Shakespeare Society was regularly given global recognition in the Shakespeare Survey, published in Stratford-upon-Avon. We were fortunate then, that Mohan brought his Kathakali 'life' into his college life, and fortunate now that, with Sabina, he has brought these two rich cultural realities into conversation.

It is a bold and imaginative achievement, to 'compare and contrast' the treatment of character as well as the treatment of general themes such as the use of disguise, the types of audience and the roles of the Messenger in these two seemingly profoundly diverse traditions. I am not qualified to say how successful this process is, I can give only full of admiration at the bold and imaginative exercise that this book represents. Let the reader read and enjoy!

**Balmullo, St. Andrews, Scotland**

## PREFACE

### SABINA ZACHARIAS

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances.*  
—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 7

Shakespeare uses a theatre metaphor to compare life to a drama acted out on a stage. Although the lines from the monologue by the melancholic Jacques are not particularly about the theatre, one can visualize actors performing the dramatic facets of life, the trials and joys alike with immense passion on stage. The emotions of the audience would oscillate from the heights of ecstasy to the throes of despair. Stella Adler, the eminent American acting teacher in her book *The Art of Acting* (2000), says, “It [theatre] is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation. The theater is a spiritual and social x-ray of its time”. That is the art and magic of all performing arts, especially theatre and drama.

For centuries people have enjoyed theatre and drama as an art form. In fact, the history of theatre can be traced back to the ancient Greeks who were the first to present dramatic performances in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. William Shakespeare’s plays had a profound influence in shaping the foundations of dramatic arts and theatre in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period commonly referred to as the Elizabethan era in England. Shakespeare’s storytelling and characterization are remarkable with the plot being prompted forward often by the moral choices and evolution of characters. Perhaps very few playwrights could appeal to the masses like Shakespeare. He transformed plays from their lofty heights of privilege to a populist art form. That his ‘human’ stories were received with great enthusiasm by the spectators is part of the glorious English theatre history.

India too has a rich and vast tradition of classical and popular performing art forms. The Indian theatrical heritage can be traced back 5000 years.

Theatre and dance have been inseparable art forms in Indian culture and are present even in the earliest works of Indian literature. Bharatha Muni (5<sup>th</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) the ancient Indian seer and writer is known as the father of Indian performing arts. His *Natya Shastra*, a theoretical treatise on Indian performing arts has been compared to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Kālidāsa (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) is considered to be India's greatest Sanskrit playwright and dramatist.

The rich theatrical tradition in India has given rise to popular art forms, especially dance dramas. They combined song and dance based on Hindu epics and mythology and mostly portrayed stories about the victory of good over evil. Very often, all-night dance dramas were popular and held throughout India, particularly to mark major festivals. Kerala, the south Indian state, has a long dramatic tradition that has given rise to the dance drama, Kathakali, one of India's most remarkable performing arts.

The curious reader might wonder what Kathakali and Shakespearean theatre have in common. Or will the twain ever meet? Both Elizabethan drama and Kathakali developed around the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century, male actors usually played female roles and the predominant themes were kingship and power, love and betrayal and passion and rivalry. Annette Leday<sup>1</sup>, the French dancer, choreographer and director who conceived a contemporary Kathakali adaptation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear* writes about the dance-drama performance, Kathakali, in an article 'Shakespeare through Kathakali's Lens' in the news outlet *FirstPost*. She says: "Akin to Freytag's pyramid – a structure with a beginning, a climax and a denouement – a traditional Kathakali recital also begin with soft tones with a gradually increasing tempo as the story progresses to the conflict, and concludes with strains that usher in a calming note. Perhaps this is what makes this dance form a beautiful patina on which to lay out a Shakespearean tragedy and have the audience experience an identical cathartic impact through the fusion, as through the play or a traditional recital."

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<sup>1</sup> Sahasrabudhe, Aishwarya. 2018."Shakespeare through Kathakali's lens: Director Annette Leday revives thirty-year-old adaptation of King Lear". *Firstpost*, December 12, 2018.

<https://www.firstpost.com/living/shakespeare-through-kathakalis-lens-director-annette-leday-revives-thirty-year-old-adaptation-of-king-lear-5702921.html>

Shakespearean theatre and Kathakali share many common threads. Sadanam Balakrishnan<sup>2</sup>, the renowned Kathakali exponent mentions many similarities between the traditions of Shakespeare and Kathakali (as cited in 'Indian Dance Theatre Meets Shakespeare' in the website, *Asia Society Switzerland*, 2017). The two theatre traditions use elevated, stylised, and poetic vocabulary. The main characters of each story are extraordinary people who are far removed from everyday people and they are intricate, fully-formed characters. Themes that predominate in both dramatic traditions include ethical decision-making, issues of justice and the significance of self-realization.

This book attempts to look at the fascinating common threads in Kathakali and Shakespeare. Using the framework of syncretism, the authors have closely studied, analysed and interpreted two different schools of performing arts – the characters from Shakespearean plays and the mythological characters in Kathakali. The characters portray the aspects of universal human nature which are relevant to all ages and times. For instance, the intricacies of filial devotion between Dakshan and Sathi and Lear and Cordelia, the manipulations and paranoia in Shakuni and Iago, the mental strength of Damayanthi and Portia and the indecisiveness of Nalan and Hamlet are viewed through the framework of management concepts, psychological theories and military rules of engagement.

The unique and interesting commonalities that the book brings out reveal the characters from both genres – Kathakali and Shakespeare can be viewed from newer and different perspectives. The analogies and cross-references drawn from other genres of literature and other disciplines are extremely engaging. This book will be of interest to academicians, practitioners of the theatre, students of performing arts and aficionados of Kathakali and Shakespeare. It is an original study combining the Eastern and Western themes, a rereading of the great Indian epics and Shakespearean classics and combining seemingly disparate characters and plots through an interdisciplinary approach.

Dr. Mohan Gopinath's sharp observations, keen insights, wide scholarship across diverse domains and above all the unalloyed passion for both Kathakali and Shakespeare have helped in shaping the flow and the unique perspective in character interpretation. It has been an honor and pleasure to be associated with this project. The journey has been personally and

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<sup>2</sup> Indian Dance Theatre Meets Shakespeare. 2017.

<https://asiasociety.org/switzerland/events/indian-dance-theatre-meets-shakespeare>.

academically enriching. We hope the readers have a delightful reading experience interacting with characters from Indian mythology, Shakespearean plays, actors from Shakespearean theatre, Kathakali actors, characters from other genres of literature and personalities from various academic disciplines.

*Go little book ...  
And red whereso thou be, or elles song  
That thou be understood, God I beseche!*  
—Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*



## A NOTE PERTAINING TO THE THEMES AND CHARACTERS

In this note, we will give a brief overview of the themes and supporting characters we have analysed from the two epics the Maha Bharatham and the Ramayanam, and Shakespeare. Overall, ten character pairs have been compared in terms of the various common themes of human nature they exhibit; we have not made a clear-cut distinction here whether these characters are Gods, demi-Gods or mortals. What was of importance were the themes *per se* and not the classification into which the characters fell. The fact that these were human qualities was accidental – they could as well have been godly virtues but we felt that the former would be more meaningful for our analyses and more interesting because of the variety they offered. Othello appears twice in the comparisons – once to portray his world view as a soldier and the other to show his sense of atonement for killing Desdemona; he is the only one who has this distinction of being referred to twice. So a total of 19 characters have been analysed. We have also not included the characters appearing in Chapter 2 and the chapter on Messengers (Chapter 6) or in the chapter on disguises (Chapter 12) because the numbers are too many to be classified like the others and this note is only here to give the reader a broad overview of the main themes which we have covered. For the statistically-minded reader, we have analysed nine main characters from the Maha Bharatham and two main characters from the Ramayanam. If the characters in the three chapters listed earlier are taken into account, these numbers will vary. We wish to indicate that the larger number of characters from the Maha Bharatham is not because of any particular reason, but just that we found them more amenable to being included in our analyses. For those readers who are analytical and would like a snapshot of the themes and characters, these are as under and are listed in the order in which they appear:

King Lear – father/child relationship. This chapter also looks at the king Dakshin from the same perspective. The theme covered is that parents should not expect grown-up children to be subservient to them all the time as they will have minds of their own. The reluctance to understand this can cause problems.

Hamlet and Nalan – a portrayal of confused people – of two men who could not make up their minds and put themselves and their close family into great distress. This also brought about the destruction of one of them while the other miraculously survived to lead a happy life. In theory, the king should have met the same unhappy fate as the Prince of Denmark but was saved by the intervention of his stronger wife, Damayanthi. She was the one who took the initiative at the proper times and brought matters to a happy close.

Bhiman and Othello – are two men of valour and straightforward thinking and the theme analysed is how such straightforward people can sometimes land in trouble because of this strain in their nature. It is paradoxical but true as we show in the chapter that people who are devious often do better in life than people who are straightforward. It sounds cynical but it is sometimes better to be devious than present a transparent facade to the people with whom one interacts. People will sometimes also respect a person more for the deviousness he or she conveys; such are the vagaries of life.

Portia and Damayanthi – the theme which we look at here is the unconscious dependence weak men have on strong women and also depend on the latter to solve their self-created problems. Antonio and Nalan would have met tragic ends if they were not rescued by bold and intelligent women. Portia also destroyed Shylock at the same time as she rescued Antony but that is (for us) an unfortunate by-product of her legal skills.

Malvolio and Arjunan – on the face of it these are good men but unfortunately have a streak in them of arrogance that trips them up at times. The negative underpinnings of this arrogance are more severely felt and shown by Malvolio than by his counterpart in this chapter. Arjunan, as we have detailed in the chapter, was more than ready to listen to his charioteer who was more than willing to force his views on the skilled archer of the 18 days war.

Iago and Shakuni – these are two men with obviously evil intentions and the overarching theme in their stories is the harm such people can do because of the presence of this highly negative trait. These are not men who are evil in the ordinary sense but have taken this trait to a pinnacle where few can follow them. They are the distilled essence of evil.

Ophelia and Seetha – these are two very unfortunate women who we felt were badly treated by their loved ones. In spite of the way they were humiliated, they bore the stress without hitting back at their tormentors and suffered in solitude – one to die and the other to live in unknown and lonely places and also give birth to twins without a family to rejoice in the event.

Othello and Parashu Raman – the theme discussed here is one of atonement. Othello killed his innocent wife and atoned for it by killing himself. Parashu Raman challenged Sri Raman and lost. He atoned for this arrogance by asking Sri Raman to destroy all the good he had accumulated as a ‘rishi’ or holy person so that he could start the process all over again. Both of them learnt a lesson but it was the sage who lived to lead a more peaceful life.

Macbeth and Pushkaran – the theme which we have covered here is one of covetousness – both men were tempted by forces outside their control (in fact by otherworldly manifestations) who told them that they were wasting their lives so to speak and that if they took their fate in their hands, a lot more awaited them. It was unfortunate that they listened to these manifestations as it resulted in very unhappy endings for both of them.

Shylock and Karnan – these were two men who were the victims of accidents of birth which is the theme of the chapter. They were also at the same time victims of circumstances and were compelled to live lives that they normally should not have had to live. But then, the accident of birth is a powerful factor in the lives of people and nothing can push the forces of this attribute to the background.

The last comparison pair is Brutus and Dharmaputhran, theoretically the eldest Pandava. They were both victims of self-delusion. This caused them to think they were acting for the greater good of the country and for the people over whom they reigned and caused them to commit acts that triggered events over which they had no control. They bring to life the saying that when someone takes a decision, he or she is also responsible for the consequences of that decision.

So the book covers a lot of ground and the unifying factors are the vagaries present in people, whether they are from this world or another place far away. It may look unusual to compare what seemingly are incomparable, but then we have done this and feel that the commonalities

we have uncovered make up for the unusual perspectives from which we approached the comparisons.

To sum this up, the characters we have analysed have between them covered a number of themes relating to human weaknesses and also strengths, and in totality present a microcosm of the vagaries of existence as we know it now. But there is one point we wish to emphasise and this is as appropriate a place as any to do so. And that is that this is not a philosophical book or a book that goes deep into the meanings of life and living, good and evil, right and wrong, etc., via the characters in the two epics and the Bard. We do not pose weighty questions and nor do we try to preach about things of which we know but little. We are not philosophers but students of English Literature who have also been exposed to the two epics and this made the comparisons possible. We are lucky that we were able to do this and this book is therefore more an exercise in rational analytics than anything else and those who will wish to look at the deeper meanings of life and existence in this book will look in vain. For that, they will have to turn to the deep thinkers in the areas we just identified.

And last of all, we would like to quote Professor Stephen Greenblatt, the John Cogan University Professor of the Humanities at Harvard who had this to say about the way he wrote. We have quoted him because what he says is relevant to us also and the way we have conveyed our thoughts in this book. We leave it to the reader to make the connections with what Professor Greenblatt (as cited in Scott, 2017) said:

The other thing I would say is that my key realization over the last, you know, 15 years of trying to do this, is that the fatal mistake is to write “down” — the notion that the way you write a book for a broader audience is to dumb it down. I’d like to have a brain transplant and be smarter — everyone would — but there’s no difference between the intelligence I try to bring to the table in academic work and this. But the difference is that with a book for a general audience, I try to remember that no one is being compelled to read the damn thing, that someone is going to have to want to turn the page, and therefore I try to use whatever narrative skills I have to motivate a reader through what is often quite difficult, complex material. In academia there is a kind of wariness, a kind of dislike of anything that seems a little too pleasurable, as if pleasure and intelligence couldn’t be married, or couldn’t be allied.

## **Reference**

Stephen Greenblatt. "The Sense of Life in What Humans Create: Stephen Greenblatt on Adam and Eve. "Interviewed by Scott Timberg. The Los Angeles Review of Books, December 14, 2017.

