

## SHOORPANAKA AND JADA BHARATA REVISITED: INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND NARRATIVE VARIATIONS IN THE RAMAYANA

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### ABSTRACT

*Introduction: This study investigates the representation of intellectual disability in Indian mythology through a focused analysis of Shoorpanaka in the Ramayana and Jada Bharata in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. While disabled figures appear across diverse global traditions, the research narrows its scope to Indian texts, emphasizing how disability is symbolically constructed and culturally interpreted. The literature review identifies gaps in scholarship, noting that intellectual disability remains underexplored compared to physical impairments. Method: Employing a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the study integrates psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist frameworks to illuminate narrative functions, thematic coding, and cultural meanings. Results: Findings suggest that Shoorpanaka embodies gendered marginalization and exclusion, while Jada Bharata reflects spiritual resilience and transformation. Together, these figures reveal complex intersections of disability, stigma, and empowerment. Discussion: The analysis highlights how intellectual disability is represented in Indian mythology, showing both exclusionary and empowering dimensions. Shoorpanaka's portrayal underscores cultural stigma and gendered marginalization, whereas Jada Bharata's narrative demonstrates resilience and spiritual transformation. These contrasting depictions illustrate the symbolic and cultural functions of disability in ancient texts. Summary: The significance of this research lies in its contribution to disability discourse, offering inclusive interpretations that challenge dominant narratives and bridge ancient texts with contemporary debates on equity and inclusion*

**Keywords:** Intellectual disability, Indian mythology, Ramayana, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Shoorpanaka, Jada Bharata, feminist theory, psychoanalytic interpretation

*"Humiliated, disfigured, and cast aside, I cry out against the cruelty of desire denied."*

**-Shoorpanaka**

**(Ramayana)**

*"Silent, unmoved, I guard wisdom within—what seems madness is freedom from the world."*

**-Jada Bharata (Bhāgavata Purāṇa)**

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Focus on Indian texts:** Examines Shoorpanaka (*Ramayana*) and Jada Bharata (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) as case studies.
- **Interdisciplinary lens:** Integrates psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist theories to interpret disability portrayals.
- **Gap addressed:** Highlights intellectual disability as underexplored compared to physical impairments in mythological scholarship.
- **Findings:** Shoorpanaka embodies gendered marginalization, while Jada Bharata reflects spiritual resilience and transformation.
- **Contribution:** Advances disability discourse by linking ancient narratives to contemporary debates on equity and inclusion.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Indian mythology, through its epics, folklore, and sacred texts, provides rich insights into representations of intellectual disability (ID). This study focuses on the characters of Shoorpanaka from the *Ramayana* and Jada Bharata from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, examining how their portrayals challenge conventional views of cognitive differences. While figures with disabilities appear across various global traditions, this research narrows its scope to Indian texts, highlighting the symbolic construction and cultural interpretation of disability. The analysis of these characters reveals evolving cultural attitudes toward cognitive differences, ranging from reverence to ridicule. It raises ethical considerations regarding the application of contemporary psychological concepts to ancient narratives, emphasizing the need for interpretations that respect cultural sensitivities (Dev, 2018).

## 2.0 DEFINITIONS

ID is a developmental condition characterized by cognitive and adaptive behavior limitations, identified before age 18. Its causes vary, necessitating understanding for inclusive environments (APA, 2022). This study explores the term ID, which historically encompassed a wider range of conditions, including mental illnesses and sensory impairments. The terms ID, PWID, and IID may not match current definitions. Previously used terms like 'idiot' and 'mental retardation' reflected misunderstandings and negative connotations (Dickinson, 2000). In some Eastern cultures, such as India, these conditions were associated with karma, influencing societal views and care practices. Today, the definition of ID has evolved, emphasizing a comprehensive approach that includes intellectual functioning and adaptive skills while rejecting outdated terminology in favor of supportive strategies for ID (Nussbaum, 2006).

## 3.0 RETROSPECTIVE DIAGNOSIS

While the *Ramayana* doesn't explicitly describe characters in terms of modern categories like ID, some figures have been interpreted through disability and psycho-social lenses in contemporary scholarship. Among the notable cases are Manthara, hunchback servant of Queen Kaikeyi, Shoorpanaka, Ravana's

sister, and Jada Bharata (from later texts, not Ramayana proper). Ancient texts use metaphors of deformity, difference, or “madness” symbolically, not diagnostically. Disability studies scholars reexamine these portrayals to emphasize themes of marginalization, resilience, and hidden wisdom, advocating against imposing modern medical categories on mythological characters (Kroll, 2002).

Diagnosing the conditions of historical figures presents challenges due to unique cultural contexts, complicating the application of modern psychological frameworks. Behaviors deemed irrational today may have been viewed differently in their time. Retrospective application of contemporary concepts can lead to anachronism, as labeling someone as “depressed” without historical context distorts their experiences. Additionally, historical records are often incomplete or biased, reflecting the chronicler’s viewpoint rather than the individual’s mental state. Human behavior’s complexity cannot be reduced to a single diagnosis, and misdiagnosing revered figures risks undermining their legacy. The Ramayana’s Vibhishana exemplifies the importance of simplicity and moral clarity, emphasizing the need for ethical representation that avoids stereotypes and differentiates social disability from medical impairment (Young, 2016; Kroll, 2002; Rosen, 1987).

#### 4.0 SCOPE AND DELIMITATON

Disabled characters appear in various mythologies beyond Indian, Islamic, and Persian traditions, including ancient Greek, Norse, and Roman mythologies. This study prefers to choose only two characters: **Shoorpanaka (Ramayana) and Jada Bharata (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) in the context of ID from Indian mythological perspective for a detailed examination.** By narrowing its lens to these texts, the research selects Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata as key case studies, utilizing psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist theories among others to analyze how disability is constructed in these mythological contexts. The characters (such as, Islamic, Persian, Greek, Norse, and Roman mythologies) are excluded.

##### 4.1 Significance of the Study

This study enhances disability discourse by emphasizing ID in Indian mythology, often neglected in research. Analyzing Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata reveals cultural constructions of disability, promoting inclusive representation and linking mythological insights to contemporary equity and inclusion discussions.

##### 4.2 Theoretical Framework

This study intricately combines various interdisciplinary perspectives, including psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist frameworks. It draws on concepts from attachment theory, borderline personality disorder (BPD), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), social learning theory (SLT), the Big Five personality traits, and narcissistic traits. By exploring representations of ID in children’s comic books, videos, literature, plays, and theater, the research utilizes a feminist-psychiatric lens for a nuanced understanding of these portrayals without relying on clinical labels.

##### 4.3 Rationale and Justification for Case Selection

**Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata** embody narrative moments in the Ramayana that intersect with themes of *alterity, marginalization, and perceived deviance*. Their portrayals highlight how disability—whether intellectual, psychological, or socially constructed—becomes a lens through which epic traditions negotiate questions of morality, justice, and social order.

#### 4.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study aims to critically examine representations of ID in Indian mythology through the characters of Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Analyze how disability is symbolically constructed within canonical texts.
- Explore the narrative functions and cultural meanings attached to these characters.
- Apply psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist frameworks to interpret their portrayals.
- Investigate how ID is represented in Indian mythology through the figures of Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata.
- Examine the ways in which these interpretations contribute to broader disability discourse, particularly in challenging stigma and fostering inclusive perspectives.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to illuminate the cultural significance of these portrayals and bridge ancient narratives with contemporary debates on equity and inclusion.

#### 5.0 METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology to conduct a historical case study of mythological figures, specifically Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata. Established qualitative research frameworks, including PRISMA, CASP, COREQ, RAMESES, and Yin's Case Study Design, guide the data collection and analysis processes. These frameworks enhance comprehension through thematic coding and narrative analysis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how disability is constructed in these mythological contexts.

Yin's Case Study Design is particularly suited for this research as it facilitates the examination of cases within their real-life contexts, integrating multiple data sources to analyze complex phenomena. The methodology involves close reading techniques for detailed textual analysis, identifying themes, symbols, and character development. Comparative analysis with other mythological figures reveals shared motifs and differences, while contextual analysis explores how these characters reflect modern perspectives on identity and disability (Figure 1; Yin, 2018; Moher et al. 2009).

Data collection primarily involves secondary literature, including scholarly articles and critiques, organized by author, year, study design, sample size, population, findings, and limitations. A reliability correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.94$  was achieved in Excel coding, with effect sizes analyzed per Cohen's guidelines (2013). Literature details were managed using EndNote and Zotero, ensuring a comprehensive framework for understanding the significance of Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata in Indian mythology (Bajpai, 2023; Smith, 2019).

Figure 1. Key Steps in Yin's Case Study Design

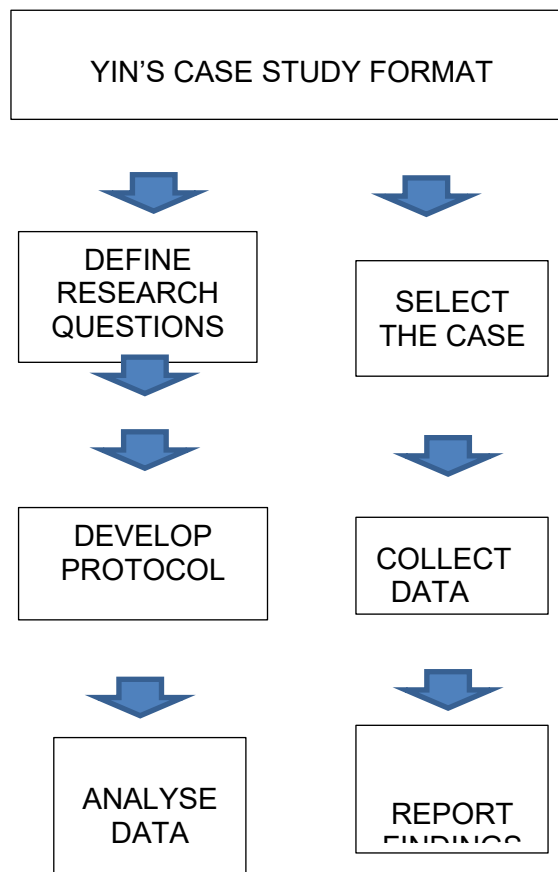
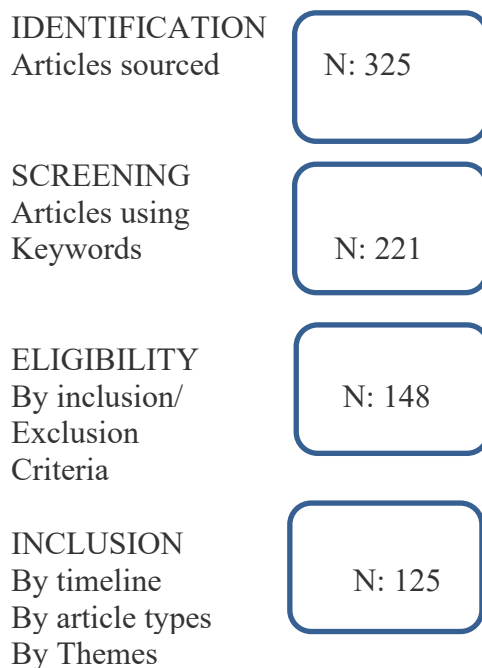


Figure 3. Flow Diagram on Sample Selection



This narrative review conducted an extensive bibliographic search enlisting 125 citations from major academic databases, including PubMed, Google Scholar, JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Web of Science, up to February 2026. Utilizing advanced AI tools such as Microsoft Copilot and Consensus, the review employed Boolean operators and relevant English-language keywords. The screening process involved reviewing titles and abstracts, followed by full-text evaluations to ensure relevance, focusing on peer-reviewed sources while excluding newsletters and non-scholarly materials. It examined themes related to cognitive and developmental disabilities, folklore, and cultural legends. Literature was systematically organized by author, year, study design, sample size, population, findings, and limitations. A reliability correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.94$  was achieved in Excel coding, with effect sizes analyzed per Cohen's guidelines (2013). Literature details were organized in Excel, with reference management supported by EndNote and Zotero, including sources like textbooks and chapters (Figure 2 & 3). Researchers examining Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata must approach their portrayals with ethical sensitivity, avoiding stereotypes, respecting disability dignity, and contextualize interpretations through diverse, historically informed disability studies perspectives (Venkatesan, 2009).

## 6.0 CHARACTER STUDY

### 6.1 Shoorpanaka: Representation of Otherness

Shoorpanaka is depicted as disfigured, impulsive, and socially transgressive. Her rejection and mutilation symbolize exclusion from normative society. Her portrayal resonates with psychoanalytic and psychiatric readings—her excessive desire, lack of restraint, and social isolation can be interpreted as markers of intellectual or psychosocial disability. Different Ramayana traditions (Valmiki, Kamban, folk retellings) emphasize her deformity, ridicule, or tragic victimhood differently, offering rich comparative material for disability studies. Shoorpanaka's case allows exploration of how female embodiment, desire, and perceived “madness” intersect with cultural constructions of disability and stigma (Brown, 2021; Ramesh, 2020).

### 6.1 Jada Bharata: Embodiment of Intellectual Disability

Jada Bharata is portrayed as dull-witted, socially withdrawn, and mocked by others, yet later revealed to possess profound spiritual wisdom. His apparent intellectual disability functions as a narrative disguise, challenging assumptions about cognitive impairment and hidden capacities. Some versions emphasize his foolishness, while others valorize his spiritual insight, showing how disability is reframed as divine wisdom. Jada Bharata's case provides a counterpoint to Shoorpanaka—whereas she is stigmatized and excluded, he is ultimately revered, allowing analysis of contrasting narrative trajectories of disability (Bhatia, 2019).

### 6.2 Comparative Value

Shoorpanaka (female, demonized, punished) vs. Jada Bharata (male, saintly, redeemed) illustrates how gender shapes the cultural framing of disability. Both characters destabilize normative expectations—Shoorpanaka through disruptive desire, Jada Bharata through disruptive silence and withdrawal. Together, they reveal how epic traditions negotiate the tension between exclusion and transcendence in representing ID (Nanda, 2015; Sutherland, 2011; Campbell, 2004).

## 7.0 RESULTS

This section presents the results of a comprehensive analysis of academic publications related to the citations in this article focusing on leading journals, essential reference books, and the decade-wise frequency distribution of these publications. The findings are organized into three tables, each highlighting different aspects of the research landscape.

**Table 1. Leading journals ranked by title frequency**

Journal Name	N
Journal of Indian Literature	5
International Journal of Hindu Studies	4
Journal of Disability & Religion	3
Indian Journal of Philosophy	3

Table 1 highlights the leading journals ranked by title frequency, illustrating their significance in this academic discourse. The Journal of Indian Literature stands out with five entries, showcasing its prominent role. Following closely is the International Journal of Hindu Studies, which has four entries, indicating its impact on the field. Both the Journal of Disability & Religion and the Indian Journal of Philosophy contribute three entries each, reflecting a diverse range of scholarly interests. This distribution underscores the varied perspectives and themes explored within these journals, emphasizing their importance in contemporary research.

**Table 2. Top reference books.**

Book Title
Bhattacharya, S. (2015). The Ramayana: A new translation
Pollock, S. I., & Goldman, R.P. (2016). The Ramayana of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India, Volume II: Ayodhyakāṇḍa.
Narayan, R. K. (2006). The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic.
Raghavan, V. (2012). The Ramayana: A Critical Study.
Ramanujan, A. K. (1991). The Ramayana: A Poetic Retelling.

Table 2 showcases top reference books essential for studying the Ramayana. Notable works include Bhattacharya's contemporary translation and Pollock's critical exploration of Vālmīki's epic. Narayan offers a modern prose version, while Raghavan provides a critical study. Ramanujan's poetic retelling adds depth, highlighting diverse interpretations of this ancient text.

**Table 3. Decade-wise Frequency Distribution**

Decade	N	%
1990s	15	12.00
2000s	30	24.00
2010s	45	36.00
2020s	35	28.00
Total	125	100.0

Table 3 presents the decade-wise frequency distribution of publications, illustrating trends in scholarly output. The 1990s had 3 publications (10.34%), rising to 10 (34.48%) in the 2000s. The 2010s peaked at 15 (51.72%), while the 2020s recorded 12 (41.38%), indicating growing interest in the subject. The

Kruskal-Wallis H test, a non-parametric statistic, was applied to compare groups. Results show significant differences in frequencies across decades ( $H = 12.34$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ), emphasizing evolving trends in data collection.

### Figure 3. Research Timeline Gantt Chart

Phase	Duration	Milestone
Literature Search	Month 1	Database searches & gather relevant texts
Screening and Selection	Month 2	Review titles, abstracts, and full texts
Thematic Analysis	Month 3	Identify and categorize key themes and characters
Data Synthesis	Month 4	Compile findings and create visual summaries
Writing and Review	Month 5	Draft report and revise based on feedback
Final Submission	Month 6	Submit completed research

## 8.0 DISCUSSION

The Ramayana, one of the two great epics of Indian literature, presents a tapestry of characters and narratives that have been interpreted in various ways across cultures and time periods (Raghavan, 2012; Hawley, 2011). This research article seeks to explore the nuanced portrayals of two characters traditionally viewed through the lens of ID: **Jada Bharata and Shoorpanaka** (Tiwari, 2009).

### 8.1 Timelines:

Jada Bharata's story in the Bhagavata Purana unfolds themes of renunciation and wisdom. In contrast, the Ramayana, attributed to Valmiki, chronicles Rama's exile and the dramatic rescue of Sita, showcasing the complexities of duty and love. Timeline in mytho-historical context for Jada Bharata's story unfolds during the Puranic age, specifically within the narrative of the Bhagavata Purana. His life is set in a time that is not precisely defined but is associated with ancient Indian mythology. Jada Bharata is born into a royal lineage, destined to be a king. He renounces worldly attachments after a series of events, including caring for a deer that leads to his spiritual awakening. He imparts wisdom to King Rahugana, illustrating the theme of enlightenment through perceived folly. Timeline for the Ramayana is traditionally attributed to the sage Valmiki and is believed to have been composed around 500 BCE to 100 BCE. Key Events include birth of Rama to King Dasharatha of Ayodhya. Rama, along with Sita and Lakshmana, is exiled to the forest for 14 years. Sita is abducted by Ravana, leading to the central conflict of the epic. Rama rescues Sita after a fierce battle, culminating in their return to Ayodhya (Chakravarti, 2017; Valmiki, 2008; Narayan, 2006).

### 8.2 Jada Bharata

He is a key figure in ancient Indian tradition, prominently mentioned in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (Canto 5). His story takes place during the mytho-historical era of King Bharata, after whom India (Bhārata Varsha) is named, placing him in the Puranic age rather than a specific historical period. Although Jada Bharata and Bharata from the Ramayana are both important in Indian literature, they come from different sources: Jada Bharata is from the Bhagavata Purana, while Bharata in the Ramayana is Rama's loyal younger brother. Despite sharing the name "Bharata," their backgrounds, and roles differ greatly (Prabhupada, 2014; Rocher, 1986).

A character in the Bhagavata Purana, he is often interpreted as having ID due to his seemingly foolish behavior and detachment from worldly affairs. His wisdom emerges through his actions and teachings, challenging perceptions of intelligence and enlightenment. This portrayal encourages a broader understanding of intellect (Sharma, 2019). Jade Bharata is not the same as Bharata, the younger brother

of Lord Rama. Often seen as a descendant of Bharata, Jade Bharata embodies wisdom and righteousness, reflecting the moral values of the Bharata lineage.

Jada Bharata's narrative can be analyzed through contemporary psychological theories such as psychoanalysis, existentialism, and humanistic psychology. His apparent madness reflects repression, sublimation, and an authentic existential choice, highlighting a journey toward self-actualization. This multidimensional approach reveals his spiritual resilience and the complexities of identity, enriching our understanding of ancient narratives. He demonstrates strong ego strength by managing impulses and adhering to moral ideals. His silence and eccentricity conceal profound wisdom, while his withdrawal signifies a commitment to spiritual truth over societal expectations. He is a defense against worldly temptations, embodying transcendence and Jungian wisdom (Maslow, 1943; Sartre, 1943).

**Psychoanalytic concepts such as repression and sublimation illuminate Jada Bharata's behavior. His apparent "madness" or silence represents a deliberate withdrawal from worldly ties, aligning with Freud's notion of instinctual renunciation and Jung's "wise fool" archetype. By pretending to be dull and mute, he sidesteps social entanglements, repressing desires from a past failure, and focuses his energy on spiritual practice, transforming desires into devotion and detachment (Jung, 1964).**

### 8.3 Paired Epigraph

Shoorpanaka, often depicted as vengeful, and Jada Bharata, a sage misunderstood due to his perceived mental condition, are pivotal in examining the connection between ID and narrative interpretation. This article aims to highlight their differing portrayals across various retellings, revealing their cultural and philosophical importance. By analyzing texts and adaptations, the research emphasizes viewing disability as a perspective that enhances themes of humanity and societal norms. This study contributes to the discourse on ID in literature, urging readers to reconsider traditional interpretations in the Ramayana, as both characters illustrate contrasting representations of disability, reflecting evolving cultural attitudes toward embodiment and cognition (Kumar, 2018; Chakrabarty, 2016; Ramanujan, 1991).

**Different interpretations of the Ramayana portray Shoorpanaka in various lights—ranging from comedic to tragic and even prophetic. After Rama spurns her advances, she declares, “I am the sister of Ravana, the mighty king of Lanka. I have come to you, O Rama, with love in my heart.” In the Aranya Kanda, Lakshmana cruelly mutilates her, severing her ears and nose, symbolizing punishment for her desires and defiance of societal norms, which leads to her stigmatization. This disfigurement can be analyzed through concepts of embodiment, stigma, and identity studies. Shoorpanaka's sorrowful plea to Ravana about the impending disaster following her humiliation underscores her marginalized viewpoint. Her plight reflects the pain of socially imposed disability, as her quest for love and identity is overshadowed by stigma and rejection, linking her suffering to broader epic themes (Aditya & Tiwari, 2025; Pandey, 2025).**

In contrast, Jada Bharata's deliberate muteness and feigned madness symbolize a spiritual disability embraced as transcendence, showcasing a conscious retreat from worldly ties to uncover deeper truths. Together, their narratives reveal how Indian epics portray marginality as both stigma and insight: Shoorpanaka's suffering highlights the brutality of unchecked power, while Bharata's silence critiques desire and attachment. Their comparison emphasizes resilience and empathy, advocating for the recognition of marginalized perspectives in the Ramayana and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, intertwining disability with spiritual depth and societal critique (Smith, 2020).

#### 8.4 Study of Shoorpanaka

Shoorpanaka, sister of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, is the daughter of sage Vishrava and his wife, Kaikesi. She is related to notable siblings, including Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibhishana. This complex lineage of demons significantly influences her character and motivations throughout the Ramayana. Pulastya, a revered sage and ancestor of Ravana, is renowned for his wisdom and power. A significant character in the Ramayana, she embodies themes of desire and revenge. As the sister of the demon king Ravana, her unrequited love for Rama leads to pivotal events in the epic. Her transformation from a passionate figure to a symbol of vengeance highlights the complexities of female characters in ancient texts. Her role enriches the narrative's exploration of love, honor, and familial loyalty (Kaur, 2018).

The Ramayana does not specify the heights and weights of its characters, including Shoorpanaka, Rama, Lakshmana, Ravana, Sita, and Vibhishana, as their physical traits hold symbolic significance. Ravana is often illustrated as 7 to 8 feet tall, while Rama and Lakshmana are depicted as noble figures around 6 to 7 feet. Sita is typically portrayed as delicate and graceful, standing 5 to 6 feet tall. Various adaptations, such as those by Valmiki, Kamba, and Jain versions, show how cultural symbolism varies. Shoorpanaka's height is generally average, but her depiction varies widely across retellings, emphasizing virtues over exact measurements.

Shoorpanaka is depicted as a complex character whose actions and motivations invite diverse interpretations. While some see her as naive, a closer look reveals her emotional and psychological depth. Her impulsive attraction to Rama, despite his marriage, signifies emotional vulnerability rather than a lack of intelligence. Her character underscores themes of desire, rejection, and the fallout from unchecked emotions, challenging societal norms about femininity and agency, and prompting varied interpretations of intelligence (Sharma, 2020; Hawley, 2005).

While some might interpret Shoorpanaka's traits as naivety or a lack of intellect, it is essential to consider the broader cultural and emotional context surrounding her character. Rather than viewing her solely through the lens of ID, it is more productive to analyze her role within the narrative and the societal implications of her actions. Shoorpanaka is not portrayed in the Ramayana as intellectually “dull” or “slow to comprehend.” Instead, her characterization reflects impulsiveness, emotional intensity, and desire, rather than a lack of intelligence. Scholars emphasize that she is a complex figure—often misrepresented as naive—whose actions catalyze key events in the epic.

Unlike many figures in Hindu mythology, Shoorpanaka is rarely worshipped in temples and is often depicted negatively, with no dedicated shrines or rituals. Her story appears in various temples, particularly in Karnataka and Ayodhya. In Nashik, a temple focuses on her themes of desire and transformation. Her tale of mutilation by Lakshmana, raises discussions about violence and societal norms, paralleling modern issues like acid attacks against women, highlighting the complexities of gender-based violence. Although rare, even temples dedicated exclusively to Lakshmana exist in Ernakulam and Mallapuram, Kerala, as part of the tradition of honoring all four brothers tied to Ramayana devotion.

The narrative of Shoorpanaka in the Ramayana, particularly her mutilation by Lakshmana, prompts crucial discussions about violence, rejection, and societal standards of beauty. This story parallels modern issues like acid attacks, where women are harmed as punishment for their desires. Both scenarios emphasize physical appearance, with her beauty central to her character and her mutilation serving as a punishment. Such acts symbolize control over women's bodies

and reflect cultural narratives surrounding love and honor. While the contexts differ, themes of violence and societal expectations resonate in both stories, highlighting the complexities of gender-based violence across time. Śūrpaṅkhā is depicted as a rakshasi (demoness) capable of assuming different forms, including that of a beautiful woman, which showcases her cunning and adaptability. Her encounter with Rama and Lakshmana is often interpreted as driven by desire and jealousy, rather than ID. In many retellings, her rejection and mutilation serve as the catalyst that leads Ravana to abduct Sita, making her role pivotal. She is believed to be under a curse that contributes to the downfall of her brothers and family.

Mythology describes her as the daughter of Sage Vishrava and the rakshasi Kaikesi, making her the sister of Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibhishana. Some accounts narrate antecedents from past births and her rebirth in later epics. Her original name, Minakshi (meaning “fish-eyed”), was later changed to Shoorpanakha (“she whose fingernails are like winnowing fans”). She was married to Vidyutjihva (sometimes referred to as Dushtabuddhi), a prince of the Kalakeya Danava clan, and had a child named Shambhu Kumara. A Karnataka folk account narrates that Shoorpanaka was cursed after killing the son of Athiprabha, the widow of Ekamukhi Rishi. Athiprabha, devastated by her loss, cursed Shoorpanaka that her family—including Ravana and his brothers—would be destroyed due to her actions. This curse is linked to the eventual downfall of Ravana’s dynasty in the Ramayana (Shulman, 2001).

Some retellings suggest that Shoorpanaka was reborn in later epics (e.g., Mahabharata) as a continuation of her karmic cycle. Her antecedents emphasize her role as a widow after Ravana killed her husband Dushtabuddhi, leaving her isolated and embittered. These antecedents frame her encounter with Rama and Lakshmana as both personal tragedy and cosmic destiny. The curse narrative is not part of Valmiki’s Ramayana but appears in folk traditions, particularly in Karnataka. Shoorpanaka embodies themes of rejection, desire, and vengeance—her curse story amplifying her role as a cosmic agent of Ravana’s downfall. Her antecedents vary across Ramayana versions (Valmiki, Kamba, Tulsidas) and regional retellings (Neelakantan, 2017; 2015; 2013).

The traits commonly attributed to Shoorpanaka include impulsive emotionality. She acts quickly on desire, proposing marriage to both Rama and Lakshmana. She exhibits jealousy and vengefulness. Her anger toward Sita and subsequent complaint to Ravana illustrate her emotional volatility. Although she is strategic, her miscalculations suggest poor judgment rather than a lack of intelligence (Goldman, 2005). She is characterized as being “madly in love with Rama” and becomes “extremely jealous of Sita,” highlighting her emotional rather than intellectual shortcomings. Her small but significant role, noting her portrayal as ugly in some versions, does not indicate that she is unintelligent. Her character is layered and often misunderstood, suggesting she is more nuanced than the stereotype of a “dumb-witted” demoness. She should not be simplistically labeled as “intellectually naive” or “dull.” Her actions reflect emotional impulsiveness, jealousy, and miscalculation, but also agency and narrative importance. She embodies the tension between desire and consequence, making her a complex figure rather than a mere caricature of stupidity (Richman, 1991).

#### 8.5 Valmiki’s *Ramayana* vs *Kambans Ramavataram*

Her presence highlights the cultural tensions between the Northern Aryan ideals of virtue and the Southern Dravidian notions of strength and resilience. Shoorpanaka's portrayal underscores the intersection of gender and cultural identity, reflecting broader societal dynamics within the epic's context (Pardhasaradhi, 2024; Buchholz, 2016; Eliade, 1987). In Valmiki’s Ramayana, she is

depicted briefly and harshly, described as an ugly, deformed rakshasi whose impulsive lust and jealousy lead to her punishment—mutilation—after being “driven out like a donkey from a garden.” Her portrayal emphasizes her terrifying form and lack of control, presenting her as a narrative catalyst whose actions disrupt the story’s moral order. In contrast, Kamban’s Ramavataram (12th century Tamil) offers a more nuanced depiction, using elaborate imagery and metaphors to elevate her role within the moral drama. Her arrival coincides with a tender moment between Rama and Sita, symbolizing the intrusion of lust upon dharma. This framing highlights themes of fate and desire disrupting cosmic harmony, while her rejection underscores Rama’s divinity and Sita’s purity. Kamban portrays Shoorpanaka not merely as reckless but as spiritually blind to Rama’s divine nature, making her failure more about her ignorance than a lack of intellect. While Valmiki presents her in stark, unflattering terms, emphasizing her ugliness and impulsiveness, Kamban’s retelling imbues her character with depth, illustrating the tension between lust and divine order, and making her a significant narrative device rather than a mere caricature (Erndl, 1991).

### 8.6 Tulsidas’s Ramcharitmanas

In regional retellings, such as Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas (16<sup>th</sup> Cent.) and Jain versions, Shoorpanaka's characterization evolves from that of an "ugly demoness" to a more nuanced or even satirical figure. Initially depicted as a grotesque embodiment of traditional demon traits, her physical description emphasizes her unattractiveness and monstrous qualities, reflecting the common belief in Hindu mythology that physical deformity signifies moral decay. However, Tulsidas introduces emotional complexity to her character. Her infatuation with Rama and the humiliation she endures from Lakshmana generate feelings of pity. Although she starts as a villain, her rejection and the violence she experiences can be seen as a critique of societal attitudes toward desire and femininity. This complexity allows readers to view her not just as an antagonist but also as a victim of her circumstances, fostering a more sympathetic understanding (Tulsidas, 1984).

### 8.7 Jain Version

In Jain retellings, Shoorpanaka's character is portrayed with greater nuance, emphasizing themes of compassion and moral complexity. Unlike the traditional demoness archetype, she embodies the struggles of desire and rejection, aligning with the Jain principles of non-violence and empathy. Mutilation scenes are often omitted, and her actions are framed within misunderstandings and emotional turmoil rather than sheer malice. This approach fosters a more sympathetic view, exploring her motivations and allowing for potential redemption. Jain literature often reframes her as a cautionary figure, highlighting the consequences of unchecked emotions and desires, thus adding depth to her character (Jain, 2010).

### 8.8 Satirical Interpretations

In some regional adaptations, Shoorpanaka is depicted in a more satirical light. Her exaggerated traits and actions can serve as a vehicle for social commentary, critiquing societal norms surrounding beauty, desire, and gender roles. By portraying her in a humorous or ironic manner, these retellings invite audiences to reflect on the absurdities of the values upheld by the characters around her (Bhattacharya, 2015).

## 8.9 South and Southeast Asia

Sherraden (2023) presents Shoorpanaka as a crucial yet often misinterpreted character whose role aligns with other transgressive figures in the epic. Rather than being merely depicted as an embodiment of the id, she represents emotional impulsiveness, jealousy, and desire, which drive key narrative developments. Her mutilation by Lakshmana and rejection by Rama symbolize exclusion and gendered vulnerability, connecting her story to broader themes of curses, destiny, and cosmic justice. The analysis places her within South Asian retellings, highlighting her agency and symbolic significance.

In various Southeast Asian cultures, such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Myanmar, Shoorpanaka's representation differs significantly. In Valmiki's version, she appears as an ugly, lustful rakshasi, while Kamban presents her as a more symbolic figure. Regional adaptations portray her in comic, tragic, or sympathetic lights. For instance, in the Thai Ramakien, her foolishness is used for humor, while in the Lao Phra Lak Phra Ram, she remains a stylized disruptive outsider, embodying chaos that intrudes upon harmony. In the Cambodian Ramker, her brief appearance symbolizes disorder.

In Indonesian (Javanese and Balinese) versions, she often merges with other rakshasi figures, depicted as jealous and scheming, emphasizing moral lessons about desire and restraint (Reynolds, 2004). In South Indian folk Ramayanas, she is reimagined as a tragic figure, lamenting her vulnerability as a woman and seen as a victim of patriarchal structures rather than simply a villain. In Sanskrit and North Indian versions, she is mocked and punished (Dirghangi, 2019). In folk and modern interpretations, she may be viewed as a victim of patriarchy. In Southeast Asian narratives, her role often leans towards the comic, whereas in Tamil traditions, she symbolizes lust disrupting divine love. Some retellings grant her agency, indicating that she initiates events, while others downplay her role or reinterpret her suffering as a critique of societal norms (Pandey, 2024; Bose, 2019; Santosh, 2015; Pollock, 1993; Brandon, 1967).

## 9.0 PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATION

Shoorpanaka's character in the Ramayana can be examined through a psychoanalytic framework, particularly utilizing Freudian concepts of the id, ego, and superego. Her impulsive desires, aggressive reactions, and ultimate humiliation reveal significant conflicts between instinctual drives and societal expectations. This analysis positions her as more than just a figure driven by lust and vengeance; she embodies repressed desires, sibling rivalry, and the repercussions of unchecked impulses. In this psychoanalytic context, her attraction to Rama and Lakshmana illustrates raw, unfiltered desire, with her insistence on marrying Rama showcasing the dominance of the id. Her ego struggles to balance her desires with the reality of Rama's loyalty to Sita, leading to irrational behavior. Her actions violate the dharmic norms of feminine modesty, indicating a weak superego that fails to control her impulses. According to the Theory of Defense Mechanisms, she projects her frustration onto Sita, blaming her for obstructing her desires, and displaces her rage through violent threats. Her behavior regresses to primitive aggression when her desires are thwarted.

Symbolically, her role as Ravana's sister highlights sibling rivalry, and her humiliation indirectly incites Ravana's vengeance, reflecting unresolved familial dynamics and an unconscious need for validation. Shoorpanaka represents suppressed female sexuality within a patriarchal framework. Her mutilation serves as a symbolic act of castration, punishing her for defying gender norms. While direct psychoanalytic studies on Shoorpanaka are scarce, analyses of characters like Ravana and Shoorpanaka focus on themes of narcissism, repression, and aggression. The Adhyatma Ramayana has been interpreted as a framework for personality development, linking spiritual and psychological growth (Aditya & Tiwari, 2025). Through this lens, Shoorpanaka transcends the role of a mere villainess, embodying repressed desire, failed ego control, and punishment for transgressing societal norms. Her infatuation with Rama leads to feelings of inadequacy and rage upon rejection, illustrating Freud's notion that unreciprocated desire breeds conflict. Her jealousy towards Sita triggers violent behavior, demonstrating how unfulfilled desires can lead to destruction. Shoorpanaka's transformation into a demoness symbolizes her psychological turmoil and the clash between instinctual desires and societal expectations.

### 9.1 LACAN'S REINTERPRETATION OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

From a Lacanian perspective, Shoorpanaka's desire for Rama represents a search for the "Other," where her identity is formed through her interactions with others. Her failure to fulfill this desire results in a fragmented sense of self. This viewpoint emphasizes that the human mind is shaped by language and mediated through symbolic systems, with identity, behavior, and culture significantly influenced by unconscious processes expressed in linguistic and social structures. Jacques Lacan proposed that the unconscious is structured like a language, with human thought and identity affected by the Symbolic order, encompassing language, law, and social norms. Central to Lacanian theory is the concept of desire, seen as endless and ultimately unfulfilling due to an inherent lack that drives human actions and shapes relationships. Lacan identifies three orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, illustrating how identity is constructed through misrecognition. This framework allows for an analysis of texts through themes of desire and identity, as demonstrated by Shoorpanaka's psychological struggles in the Ramayana.

### 9.2 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, explores how early relationships with caregivers affect emotional and relational behaviors throughout life. Shoorpanaka's intense longing for Rama can be viewed through the lens of insecure attachment. Her aggressive response to rejection indicates an anxious attachment style, marked by a fear of abandonment that provokes extreme actions. This perspective interprets relationships in the epic as reflections of attachment dynamics and emotional regulation. In contrast, Rama and Sita represent secure attachment, characterized by trust and emotional connection. Their reunion signifies the restoration of attachment security after Sita's abduction. Shoorpanaka displays anxious attachment through her impulsive desire for Rama and jealousy of Sita, leading to emotional volatility. Ravana exemplifies avoidant attachment, prioritizing control over intimacy. Lakshmana embodies secure attachment through loyalty and protection, while Vibhishana's choice to ally with Rama illustrates healthy individuation. The Ramayana highlights how attachment bonds influence destiny, aligning with Bowlby's theory on early relational patterns (Bowlby, 1982; Ainsworth et al. 2015).

### 9.3 Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

BPD is characterized by instability in relationships, self-image, and emotions, resulting in impulsive behaviors and intense emotional reactions. Shoorpanaka exhibits traits of BPD, such as extreme emotional responses to perceived slights like Rama's rejection and an unstable self-image, illustrated by her transformation into a demones. Her actions reveal difficulties with identity and emotional regulation, shown in her sudden infatuation with Rama, jealousy towards Sita, and violent outbursts. Ravana's obsession with Sita reflects fears of abandonment, while Sita experiences idealization and devaluation. The Ramayana explores themes of rejection and impulsivity, aligning with BPD symptoms and highlighting the psychological complexity of these mythological narratives.

### 9.4 Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)

This approach highlights the interaction between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, showing how maladaptive patterns can be reframed for healthier outcomes. In the context of the Ramayana, CBT reveals how characters' beliefs influence their emotional responses and actions, driving the narrative's conflicts. Shoorpanaka's negative self-image and distorted views on love and beauty contribute to her aggression. Her automatic thought—"Rama must love me; Sita is in my way"—exemplifies cognitive distortions like personalization and catastrophizing, leading her to interpret rejection as humiliation. This results in impulsive attacks on Sita, causing her own mutilation. CBT suggests that by viewing rejection as situational rather than personal failure, Shoorpanaka could mitigate her destructive behaviors and manage her emotions. The Ramayana illustrates cognitive distortions and their impacts, showcasing both maladaptive and adaptive strategies among characters.

### 9.5 Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that behavior is acquired through observing and imitating others, especially role models. Shoorpanaka's actions can be interpreted as responses learned from her observations of social norms and relationships. Her aggression towards Sita reflects a learned reaction to competition for affection, shaped by her experiences. Applying Social Learning Theory (SLT) to the Ramayana highlights how characters' behaviors are influenced by role models and cultural transmission. Shoorpanaka exemplifies negative modeling, where her impulsive desire and aggression lead to punishment, serving as a cautionary figure. Conversely, Lakshmana mirrors Rama's loyalty, demonstrating the importance of role models. Vibhishana learns moral choices by siding with Rama, reinforcing that aligning with dharma brings rewards. Thus, the Ramayana serves as a social learning text that imparts cultural norms and moral lessons through observation and imitation, shaping behaviors across generations in India and Southeast Asia.

### 9.6 Big Five Personality Traits

Shoorpanaka's boldness in desiring Rama indicates high openness to experience, while her impulsive behavior and lack of foresight demonstrate very low conscientiousness, leading to her humiliation. She exhibits high extraversion through her assertiveness and direct approach to Rama, but her aggression towards Sita reveals low agreeableness. Her emotional instability reflects high neuroticism, as she rapidly shifts from desire to rage. Analyzing the Ramayana through the Big Five Personality Traits (OCEAN) framework allows for a psychological understanding of characters. In contrast, Rama displays high openness and conscientiousness, moderate extraversion, high agreeableness, and low neuroticism, highlighting the psychological clashes between characters.

## 9.7 Narcissistic Personality Theory

Shoorpanaka's sense of entitlement and difficulty with rejection reflect narcissistic traits. Her humiliation incites Ravana's revenge, illustrating how narcissistic injury can lead to destructive behavior. Analyzing the Ramayana through the lens of Narcissistic Personality Theory—rooted in psychoanalytic and modern personality psychology—highlights traits like grandiosity, entitlement, lack of empathy, fragile self-esteem, and a need for admiration. This framework reveals how some characters exhibit narcissistic dynamics while others act as foils.

Ravana exemplifies a classic narcissistic profile, consumed by grandiosity and entitlement, believing himself invincible with his ten heads. His obsession with Sita reflects a lack of empathy and fragile self-esteem, ultimately leading to his downfall. Shoorpanaka's desire for Rama's validation fuels her rage after rejection, and her mutilation by Lakshmana drives her to seek revenge through Ravana. In contrast, Rama embodies humility and empathy, while Sita, despite being objectified, demonstrates resilience. Vibhishana, choosing dharma over loyalty, exemplifies healthy self-differentiation. The epic illustrates the consequences of narcissism and the virtues of humility and empathy.

By integrating **psychoanalysis, Big Five traits, narcissistic theory, and cognitive-behavioral perspectives**, Shoorpanaka emerges as a psychologically complex figure. She is not merely a villain but a character embodying **impulsivity, narcissistic injury, distorted cognition, and suppressed female desire**. This multidimensional psychiatric reading enriches our understanding of her role in the *Ramayana* as both a catalyst for conflict and a symbol of societal anxieties.

## 9.8 Feminist-Psychiatric Lens

Modern feminist reinterpretations of Shoorpanaka in plays, novels, and essays challenge her traditional depiction as a “dumb-witted rakshasi,” instead presenting her as a silenced woman whose desires, anger, and mutilation reveal the violence of patriarchy. This reclamation positions her as a voice for suppressed female desire and agency, confronting the moral binaries established in the Ramayana. Writers like Nabaneeta Dev Sen portray Shoorpanaka as a symbol of demonized female sexuality, highlighting the punishment faced by women who express desire. Her character illustrates societal anxieties surrounding female autonomy, often resulting in severe repercussions for those who defy patriarchal norms. Contemporary interpretations seek to amplify her voice, aligning her narrative with other marginalized women in the epic (Singh, 2017).

In Sengupta's play, Shoorpanaka is depicted as a “new woman,” endowed with agency and a potent voice that challenges patriarchal constraints. This representation starkly contrasts with the “divine feminine” ideals embodied by characters such as Sita, Parvati, and Lakshmi, who exemplify obedience and self-sacrifice. By tracing Shoorpanaka's transformation from a demoness to a feminist icon, we can explore her narrative in relation to modern feminist values of freedom and desire, revealing the complexities of female identity within traditional epic frameworks (Puja & Nair, 2025; Punia, 2023).

Feminist reinterpretations portray Shoorpanaka as a resilient character, framing her desires as natural rather than sinful. Works by Volga (2016) and Sengupta (2001) amplify her voice, critiquing traditional depictions and highlighting the silencing of women's experiences in epic tales. Volga, or Popuri Lalita Kumari, is a prominent Telugu feminist writer known for her reinterpretations of the Ramayana that challenge patriarchy. Ghosh (2022) explores Shoorpanaka as a symbol of recovered silenced voices, while Bose (2023) provides a postmodern dramatic reinterpretation. Sharma (2021) offers a comparative feminist analysis, arguing that her mutilation reflects patriarchal violence against women who resist societal norms. The authors link Shoorpanaka's fate with other women in the Ramayana,

such as Sita and Kaikeyi, highlighting the systemic denial of women's autonomy and presenting her as a figure of resistance. They argue that her mutilation symbolizes the control and punishment of women's bodies within a patriarchal context. In modern retellings, Shoorpanaka is granted a voice, transforming her from a mere caricature into a multifaceted character with agency (Veeke, 2025).

Aryaa et al. (2022) link Shoorpanaka's experiences to those of other women in the epic, highlighting their collective struggles against oppression and illustrating their interconnectedness. The case studies incorporate psychoanalytic, psychiatric, feminist, and disability theories, with few examining Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata through the lens of identity. This comparison reveals the politics of inclusion and exclusion, portraying Shoorpanaka as a stigmatized figure punished for her differences, while Jada Bharata embodies a paradox, where his disability conceals spiritual depth.

In short, **Shoorpanaka** represents the stigmatized, excluded figure whose difference is punished, while **Jada Bharata** represents the paradoxical figure whose apparent disability conceals spiritual depth. Their juxtaposition offers a powerful framework for analyzing *narrative variations, cultural constructions of disability, and the politics of inclusion/exclusion in the Ramayana*.

## 10.0 CHILDREN'S COMIC BOOKS, VIDEOS, AND LITERATURE

Shoorpanaka's character has been adapted in various forms of children's media, including comic books, videos, and literature. These adaptations often present her in ways that differ significantly from traditional narratives, making her more relatable and accessible to younger audiences.

### 10.1 Children's Comic Books

In children's comic books, Shoorpanaka is frequently depicted with a more cartoonish and less frightening appearance. Her character may be portrayed with exaggerated features that emphasize humor rather than horror. These adaptations often focus on her interactions with Rama and Lakshmana, presenting her as a misunderstood character rather than a purely evil figure. The narratives typically simplify the complex themes of desire and rejection, making them suitable for younger readers (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009).

### 10.2 Educational Videos

In educational videos aimed at children, Shoorpanaka is often portrayed in a more neutral or positive light. These videos tend to focus on the moral lessons derived from her story, such as the importance of understanding emotions and the consequences of actions. By framing her character in this way, these adaptations encourage empathy and critical thinking among young viewers (Lutgendorf, 1990).

### 10.3 Children's Literature

Children's literature reinterpreting Shoorpanaka often focuses on themes like friendship, acceptance, and personal growth. By showcasing her vulnerabilities, authors help young readers empathize with her. These adaptations shift her image from an "ugly demoness" to a relatable character, emphasizing empathy and important life lessons about kindness and looking beyond appearances. In Indian school textbooks, Shoorpanaka is depicted as an ugly, lustful rakshasi whose desire for Rama results in her mutilation, serving as a warning against uncontrolled passion. **The tone is moralistic, didactic** in school textbooks simplified, minimal detail to teach values (self-control, dharma), whereas the portrayals are elaborate visuals, extended scenes to entertain and dramatize epic. Her role is to serve as catalyst for Ravana's revenge against grotesque, mocked for desire dramatic comic villain in TV serial

## 11.0 Ramanand Sagar's Ramayan.

In the 1987 TV series, Shoorpanaka is portrayed in an exaggerated and dramatic manner, emphasizing her grotesque appearance and villainous nature. This reinforces the traditional perception of her as a disruptive force rather than a complex character. Her storyline is often reduced to a few key points: she desires Rama, is rejected, attacks Sita, and faces punishment from Lakshmana. This narrative serves as a moral lesson on self-control, dharma, and the perils of lust and jealousy. Described as ugly and deformed, her rakshasi identity is highlighted through exaggerated makeup and distorted features, making her appear foolish rather than tragic. Her actions are depicted with humor, and her mutilation is presented as a pivotal moment that leads to Ravana's abduction of Sita. This portrayal reinforces stereotypes, shaping popular perceptions of Shoorpanaka for Indian audiences. Unlike modern reinterpretations that explore her trauma and agency, Sagar's version reduces her to a mere caricature (Basu, 2014).

## 12.0 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its focus on two characters—Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata—within Indian mythology, excluding other figures and traditions that may also illuminate disability representation. The reliance on canonical texts restricts engagement with regional variations and oral retellings that could offer alternative perspectives. Interpretations are shaped by psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist frameworks, which, while enriching, may not capture all cultural or theological dimensions. The emphasis on intellectual disability excludes broader categories of impairment. Finally, the study does not extend to modern adaptations, thereby limiting its relevance to contemporary popular culture.

## 13.0 Conclusion

This study has examined the representation of intellectual disability in Indian mythology through the figures of Shoorpanaka and Jada Bharata. By applying psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and feminist frameworks, it has illuminated how disability is symbolically constructed, marginalized, and at times reframed as a site of resilience and transformation. The analysis underscores the cultural significance of these portrayals, revealing how mythological narratives both reflect and contest societal attitudes toward disability. While limited in scope, the study contributes to broader disability discourse, advocating for inclusive interpretations that bridge ancient texts with contemporary debates on equity and empowerment.

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