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Mapping the Reiteration of Mythical Tales in Indian Literature during Post-Independent and Modern Times

Ravaliya Nirali Laxmanbhai

PH.D. Scholar, Department of English,

Bhakta Kavi Narsinh Mehta University, Junagadh

Dr. Nayankumar D. Tank

Professor, Gurukul Mahila Arts and Commerce College, Porbandar



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Abstract:

Present research paper aims at inquiring the initiation of retelling the mythical tales in post-independence India. Indian, especially Hindu mythology is a rich heritage of the nation and people know about most the stories irrespective of the faith they follow. At the dusk of 20th century and the dawn of 21st century, there has been a great resurgence of weaving these mythical tales, either from celebrated epic duo of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, or from other mythical tales from Veda, Upanishad and other Puranas. Numerous fictional and non-fictional writers have taken up one or more themes from these sources and crafted wonderful literary works. This research paper also examines the reasons behind this, not so sudden but not so noticed, phenomena of reiterating mythologies of India.

Keywords: Myth, Mythology, Tales, Epics, Fiction, Novel



Introduction:

Mythos is a Greek word that literally translates as ‘speech and it refers to tales that are told aloud and which are based on the notions and perspective of the individual who's really telling the tales. Mythologies are mystical narratives that have a correlation to man's past experiences and are passed down through generations. In this religious story, mysterious protagonists such as Supreme beings, Gods and goddesses, as well as other equivalent souls who show up in different forms all across antiquity appear in a variety of ways. cosmological myths are symbolic storylines from the distant past that are linked to cosmology. In them, the protagonists either fly through the environment or carry out a predetermined chain of deeds that have been predestined. As a result, myths are crafted from the accumulated understanding or perspective of a segment of the population. In this particular instance, the myth is trying to express a commonly accepted fact.

Mythology is not confined to the interpretation of the physical world and speculation about the universe's genesis. It goes beyond that and discusses further topics. It adopts a philosophical tone when discussing why the world is the way it is and where it is headed. It becomes ritualistic when it discusses the everyday activities of humans in a particular culture. In a nutshell, myth is a technique of explaining why things, places, or manners are the way they are. Mythology expresses a culture's perspective. It represents people's perceptions and beliefs about humanity's place in nature and the universe. Additionally, it expresses the bounds and workings of people's natural and spiritual worlds. While myth cannot be discarded as a fabrication, it is critical to appreciate its significance in human life and the function it plays in molding an individual. There are so many things that must be rejected if an endeavor to interpret the universe is to be abandoned immediately, in order to reduce life to a mechanical state incapable of experiencing any form of pleasure. Myth theory and literary criticism is a relatively young interdisciplinary field within the humanities that sheds light on anthropology, classics and philology, folklore, history, language learning, linguistics, literature, psychology, and philosophy, among other fields.



Indian Mindset in Changing Times:

Material advancements, scientific research, and technological advancements have all had a significant impact on the world we live in today. Skepticism has permeated all aspects of human existence. Logic is used to test traditional concepts such as faith, which are then rejected. Ancient legends and traditions, on the other hand, are read and repeated in an attempt to decipher the reality that lies beneath the surface. Throughout the last fifty years, retellings have become increasingly popular. India is a literary and ethnic behemoth with a long and illustrious history. In India, mythology is more than just literature; it is an essential component of the dominant heritage and cannot be separated from it. The traditional literature of India, as well as its value transmission, continues to exert influence on the Indian mind. Traditions and beliefs are still alive and well in Indian culture. Indians have a strong interest in their own history and mythology, which is understandable. According to the reasonable world, myth has lost its allure because mythical tales do not appear to be based on factual information.

In spite of this situation several authors have decided to rewrite mythical stories for the modern world's purposes and tastes, sensing the Indian public's mindset. They have very insightfully borrowed from the ancient mythical tales of India and turned it into wonderfully weaved fictions. The probably had this realization that it is impossible to distinguish Indian psyche from its rich mythological heritage of tales and if they are presented in a form modern audience can relate, they would not only readily read these works but their interest in the original mythologies would be evoked as well.

The Modern Resurgence in 21st Century: Ashok Banker and Devdutt Pattanaik

Ashok Kumar Banker, an internationally famous contemporary author and screenwriter, pioneered the genre of mythological retellings. His retellings of India's mythological epics established him as one of the country's most prominent writers. He



authored eight volumes of the 'Ramayana Series,' which are credited with reviving mythology in Indian publication. The eighth novels in the series are Prince of Ayodhya, Siege of Mithila, Demons of Chitrakut, Armies of Hanuman, Bridge of Rama, King of Ayodhya, Vengeance of Ravana, and Sons of Sita. His Epic India Library is an attempt to retell all of the Indian subcontinent's myths, tales, and history in a single gigantic story cycle spanning over seventy volumes. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* is an intense work about the Mahabharata. The tale incorporates numerous local and regional variants of the Mahabharata, including the 'Pandvani', Maharashtra's 'Gondhal', Tamilnadu's 'Terukuttu', and Karnataka's 'Yakshagana'. It also features many pictures, including line drawings by the author. Devdutt Pattanaik illustrates the Ramayana in his *Sita*, highlighting the numerous oral, visual, and literary retellings created over time. The book approaches Ram through the various stages of Sita's life and the roles she plays. Pattanaik attempted to decipher the metaphorical significance contained in Indian myth. His Myth=Mythya is an endeavour to unearth the philosophical meaning concealed in the literary and aesthetic manifestation of Indian culture. He understands and expresses the underlying meaning of Hindu paintings and culture through his *Seven Secrets of Shiva*, *Seven Secrets of Vishnu*, and *Seven Secrets of Hindu Calendar Art*.

Some Lesser Known Works:

In M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham*, Bhima is the book's major protagonist. The entire Mahabharata is narrated in the first person, from Bhima's perspective. Arjuna or Yudhishtira are always preferred, despite the fact that Bhima is renowned for his bravery. As he struggles to reconcile himself to the unbending demands of a 'Kshatriya', the book chronicles his joys, heartbreak, and frustrations. Angst is a prominent subject that runs throughout this novel. Ramesh Menon's *Krishna-The Blue God* is written in lyrical writing that captures all the beauty and excitement of the original. However, he has attempted to make this spiritual literary classic accessible to both older and younger generations. He succeeded in his attempt to convey the enormity of the original texts and to deliver their material in a more secular and efficient manner. Chitra Divakaruni offers Draupadi a new voice in her *Palace of Illusions*. It is a first-of-its-kind book. This book begins with Arjuna experiencing a battle-related courage crisis at 'Kurukshetra.' This work is written from a



feminist standpoint. The Mahabharata story focuses on Draupadi's character and position. Irawati Karve examines the humanity of the Mahabharata's characters, focusing on their manifold qualities and equally numerous shortcomings. The work reflects the author's nature: secular, scientific, and anthropological. She is a lover of literature and is concerned with both past and present social concerns. She attempts to reconcile the present world's core with her *Yuganta*, a rendition of the Mahabharata. It is also an attempt to rationally narrate the original Mahabharata story, giving the reader the impression that they are not works of fiction but the genuine stories of ancient heroes. *The Parva* of S. L. Bhyrappa is a Mahabharata tale written in Kannada as a monologue. Throughout the 'Kuruksheetra' war, numerous major characters from the original Mahabharata recount nearly their entire lives. It is the turning of an ancient legend into a modern fiction. Bhyrappa attempts to give voice to each of the Mahabharata's characters and encourages readers to consider the idea of numerous truths. Pratibha Ray attempts to dispel the myth that a woman is responsible for the greatest conflict of all time in her retelling of the Mahabharata, titled *Yagyaseni*. This is not merely a reaction to patriarchal thought patterns, but also an attempt to articulate women's unseen sufferings. She strives to justify Draupadi's conduct in Mahabharata by blaming others for the annihilation of the 'Kuru' race. Thus, she becomes a woman advocating for a legendary woman who has been accused of being the cause of the 'Kuruksheetra' conflict on a continual basis.

Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy and Ramayana Series:

Amish Tripathi is one of the most renowned authors in this genre, having attempted to accomplish more than his predecessors and contemporaries. He has not only repeated the narrative, but also attempted to validate it in the modern realm of logical thinking. His Shiva Trilogy reintroduces the noble legacy of general welfare in ancient India. Additionally, it validates Indian mythological storytelling. He accomplishes this by his deft placement of the individuals within the background of history. He has also taken up the characters of the Ramayana for the next series which includes novels like *Ram: Scion of Ikshwaku*, *Sita: The Warrior of Mithila* and *Ravan: The Enemy of Aryavarta*. Amish Tripathi is one of the most celebrated mythological novelists of the present India. His works are translated in almost all regional languages and that is an important proof of his popularity. The distinct feature of his



novels is his rendition of mythical characters in a human form with utmost humane emotions. Not only he depicts the topographical details of ancient India in a very detailed yet interesting manner, his logical depiction of divinities as human being is a bright chapter of Indian English novels.

The Ramayana, The Mahabharata and its Place in Indian Psyche:

Mircea Eliade, in his critical discourse states that “Myth is an extremely complex cultural reality which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints” (14). The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, two classic Sanskrit epics from ancient India, provide the foundation for Hindu mythology. Despite the passage of centuries, these two wonderful pieces of art continue to breathe in the lives of all Indians. It is an unavoidable element of a person's day-to-day existence. In India, babies are taught about Ram and Krishna before they are born. They encounter many real-life occurrences related to these two great epics on their path from youth to adulthood. Even now, comprehending the myths is necessary to assess modern India's complex social, political, and religious outlooks. Devdutt Pattanaik comments on the nature of myth:

Myth is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together. All myths make profound sense to one group of people. In fact, in the final analysis, you either believe them or you do not. If the myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea. Mythology constitutes stories, symbols and rituals that make a myth tangible- the language that are heard, seen and perform together; together they construct the truths of a culture. (PattanaikMyth 214)

Indian myth is never static; it is always vibrant and dynamic. It is continuously rereading, reinterpreting, and recreating itself as well as the society it defines. Myths give birth to beliefs, whereas mythology influences behavior and communication, according to Pattanaik. As a result, myth and mythology have a significant impact on culture and vice versa. The myth is being examined from several angles in the present era. As the needs of the



moment change, so do its mind-sets, visions, beliefs, habits, and responses. C. N. Ramachandran expresses his thoughts on modern myths in his paper on this occasion.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are compendiums of history, politics, religion, ethics, and poetry; and they, as part and parcel of Indian collective experience, have fascinated, thrilled, teased and repelled the Indian imagination since time immemorial. Hence each age finds itself compelled to return to these myths and to re-read them so as to make them contemporaneous. As the wise singer of Bhil Bharath wonderfully puts it, 'jhugjayanvarta age ha,'- ("ages pass, but the story continues.") (Ramachandran 81)

In today's world, Ramachandran's viewpoints are quite correct. It's also a new starting to reread them with the time formation. A recent wave of storytelling method involves rereading and reworking old stories from new and distinct angles. Stud Terkel recommends, "People are hungry for stories. It is a part of our very being. Storytelling is a form of history, of immortality too. It goes from one generation to another." (Leabvii)

Mythical Retelling for Feminine and Marginalized Voices:

The aforementioned points are still relevant in today's world, since stories are for future generations, and resurrecting myths in modern form is the finest way to conserve our ancient treasure in modern times. There are various stories throughout the ancient great epics, as well as numerous outstanding and significant personalities. The Ramayana is divided into seven parts, each of which is referred to as a kand, or chapter. The Ramayana's whole tale revolves around the Ram, the epic's hero. There are numerous other characters who have glorifications; without them, the Ramayana storey would not exist. Sita, Lakshman, Kaikeyi, Ravana, Vibhishana, Hanuman, and many others are among them. Modern authors write about a specific character in order to provide complete justification for that character. Amish Tripathi, the current author, is working on a Ram Chandra series. Devdutt Pattanaik also writes a lot of retelling stories based on Ramayana characters. Other female authors who write on Indian myth and mythology include Chitra Banerjee, Kavita Kane, Geeta Hariharan,



Mahasweta Devi, and many others. It is only by understanding the multitudinous ways in which this hegemonic myth of Indian Womanhood serves patriarchy in both local and global manifestations that one can expect to grasp the multitudinous ways it serves patriarchy. The myth, of course, serves caste and class interests as well.

The question that emerges in one's mind is why is it necessary to reread and retell such mythology by female authors? Why aren't modern people content with the Ramayana or Mahabharata as epics and stories? Many female writers, particularly in this moment, are writing about the epics' most underappreciated characters. Kavita Kane, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Dr. Malini are just a few examples. These female authors write about the female characters who survive but in the background of the ancient epic Ramayana. In her work *Sita's Sister*, Kavita Kane explores the character of Urmila, who appears in the Valmiki Ramayana as Sita's sister and Lakshmana's wife. She isn't known by any other name. Kane, on the other hand, gives her a new identity and a new voice. She relates her own story about what occurs when Ram, Sita, and Lakshman are exiled and she leaves to dwell in Ayodhya's doomed palace. In Kavita Kane's novel *Lanka's Princess*, the same thing happened to Surpankha. She experienced numerous problems during her life as a princess of Lanka and the sister of the mighty king Ravana. Surpankha, which means "as hard as nails" in Sanskrit, is the most misunderstood figure in the Ramayana. She is born as Meenakshi, the beautiful fish-shaped eyed woman. Growing up in the shadow of her brothers, who were destined to win wars, renown, and status, she chose a path of suffering and vengeance instead. According to Mary Brockington the characters of the Ramayana are:

All the characters are humanized and fall to the vices and social restrictions of ordinary humans. Even the demoness Surpankha is transformed into a regular person. The very human framing of women as mothers or as beings susceptible to lust and envy, reflectively emphasizes the internal conflicts of the heroes and villains and ambiguity of Rama and Ravana's supposed ethics. (Brockington 89)

The above-mentioned review accurately depicts the current state of affairs in the world. Every human is born with numerous qualities, but social, cultural, economic, ethical,



and other norms and constraints transform a person from man to demon. Internal conflict of the mind or emotions causes situations in which a man favours positivity or negative. A person's moral and ethical goal is to stay on the side of virtues instead than vices.

Kane's two female characters are the most misunderstood, underappreciated, and misunderstood. In the male-dominated society, they both gain a new identity and respect. In this circumstance, when the famous epic Ramayana was composed by the prominent sage Valmiki, this society was also dominated solely by men. And while it is currently ruled by men, there is a need for a female voice, which has been silenced for a long time. As a result, female authors that write from a feminine perspective and justify the underrepresented female characters are needed. Mandakranata Bose had something to say about it:

We must look beyond the classical, national and sometimes even the textual to find these marginal voices, even if they do not universally agree with each other. (Bose 113)

Females, according to Bose, are treated as second-class citizens in a male-dominated society. Women are referred to as "others" rather than "equals." In the Ramayana, the entire plot revolves around Ram, not Sita; she suffers greatly and, in the end, becomes guilty. The acclaimed modern author Chitra Banerjee beautifully depicts Sita's narrative. Again, Kader Aki has something to say about Sita:

Sita has lived in total self-denial ever since she married. She suppressed her own wishes, like playing the veena, and placed the ideology of the perfect woman above her own needs. She achieves her goal to be the mother, the perfect wife, and daughter-in-law on her psychic cost. (Kader 150)

Banerjee tells Sita's story through the eyes of Sita, the key figure. Sita is the central character of her work *The Forest of Enchantments*. Sita narrates her own tale, including her pleasures and sufferings, misery and victory, heartbreak and resilience, and her understanding of what love is, in her own words. Amitav Ghose, a well-known novelist, compliments



Banerjee's work, calling her "one of the most startlingly poetic voices of writing about the lives of Indian women."

Ghose wishes to emphasize that being a woman and writing about a woman about whom one dares to discuss and write anything up to the present day is a challenging undertaking. No one can deny that a woman can write in such a compelling manner. It is not simply Sita's narrative, but it is also the story of every single woman who lives in the household dogmas of Indian society. It is the story of a group of Indian ladies who are suffering while living in a sophisticated, civilized, and advanced society. According to *The New Indian Express*:

Banerjee is markedly feminist...Her spin on the most pivotal moment of Sita's life, the agnipariksha episode, is a moment of feminist brilliance. Her Sita answers all the questions we would have had when listening to the Ramayana while leaving us with plenty of food for thought. (The New Indian Express Daily 3)

The New Indian Express review reflects the truth of Indian culture. Banerjee is a feminist writer who focuses on women's issues, such as their sufferings, rights, sacrifices, and remedies. Many questions arise in the mind if one only looks at things from Sita's perspective. However, no solutions can be found until the story of The Forest of Enchantments is read. Banerjee is the finest at providing answers to the questions that arise in one's head. Through the hands of Chitra Banerjee, Sita was able to transform herself from a marginalized lady into a key character of dignity, authority, and purpose. In a journal Dr. Indira Goswami states that:

It is said that Valmiki was the first poet to portrait Sita as the supreme personification of chastity, devotional love, sacrifices and eternal loyalty, emerging triumphant through all ordeals, trials and tribulations. (Goswami 47)

The ideas of sage and poet Valmiki about Sita's character are clean and magnificent. She possesses numerous qualities, and vices frequently try to compel her to give up her



virtues, but she perseveres through all of life's trials and tribulations, never surrendering to demerits.

Two significant aspects of the lady are represented in Indian mythology. The woman is depicted as 'Shakti' by seers and sages. The Goddesses Durga, Gauri, and Maha-Kali are manifestations of 'Shakti,' and they embody energy, fertility, and power. Shakti is the goddess of creation, destruction, and diabolical powers, as well as the restorer of harmony. Devi or Shakti appears in a variety of forms, incarnations, and names. Women, on the other hand, are assigned to the roles of 'Other,' 'Secondary,' and 'Subordinate.' As there is a conflict between virtue and vice, there is also a conflict between 'Shakti' and 'Secondary.' Audrey Truschke, as a response to this, writes:

Such is the logic of modern misogyny that it demands female voices in the grand Ramayana tradition remain subordinate to male feelings. In order to understand Valmiki's text, it is important to recover Sita's voice... (Seyller 201)

Reconstruction of the 'female' characters represented in the Ramayana and the life of an ordinary woman in contemporary society, all of these women are not far away, whether in an Indian context or on a global scale. However, the questions and trials faced at various stages of one's life, whether it is following one's own ambitions, finding a common ground while interacting with one's family and friends, or having an impact on the society around one, these characters, when measured in comparison to one another and having recognized the similarities, the modern woman cannot learn from mistakes, but must make the right choices.

The characters of demons, queens, ascetics, and goddesses are designed to be a foundation of delight, but they can also be materialized in one's own life when seen as representations of bigger kinds of shortcoming to learn from and relish at the same time.



Conclusion:

With the Ramayana's complex impact on Indian culture, it's important to note that these critiques are limited to those characters recounted by Valmiki in his great work of art. Looking at the other aspects is outside of the operating domain. The reconstruction or reinterpretation of the female characters of the Valmiki Ramayana is a pressing issue in our time. As a result, a number of well-known female authors have taken up this moral responsibility. The Ramayana has taken on new dimensions in modern India, and it has survived due to its vastness, perceptiveness, and spiritual significance. Any writer's first goal is to please their audience and lead them to the truth. Because Indian people are born and raised with myth, it is not a relic of the past but a living part of their lives and culture. History has a past, and myth has always been a part of it. The Indian writer, more than most other writers, benefits from a wealth of resources for his work here. Of course, a bright writer must pay a price for a flimsy use of freely available mythical stock, just as he can fall into the trap of the medium by relying only on his craft abilities. This has been seen in the instance of Indian English fiction writers from the 1980s and 1990s, whose writing has the brilliant brilliance of a firework, making the darkness deeper without light. The employment of myth as a tactic for presenting modern fact, no matter how effective, might pose some difficulties for the writer. If someone is not a benefactor of the mythological tradition's survival, his use of myth on a technical, skilled level will only result in either willing or unwitting distortion, or a stereotyped yoking of myth with reality. In the hands of a writer, a fact should flower into truth, according to Thoreau. In the same way, myth should blossom into reality. Any writer's goal is not to write down anything he or she thinks or believes. The writers have a great task in hand: to extract the truth from myths. The reality that has previously gone unnoticed and unexplored by others. Modern authors bear a significant amount of responsibility for the mythical characters they represent in their works of art. While portraying old characters, any author has a moral responsibility to awaken decorum in society.



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