

RESURGENCE OF HINDU MYTHOLOGY IN INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH –A LATEST TREND OF RETELLING KNOWN STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Mythology has always been a preferred topic in story telling not only in India but also in the whole world. Hindu Mythology forms an integral part of Indian culture and civilization, with every Hindu believing firmly on incarnation Vishnu as the redeemer, Shiva as the destroyer and Brahma as the creator. Ram, Krishna, Ravan,,Sita, Draupadi,Uttara, Kunti are household names as every generation grew up listening to the stories from the mythology from their grandparents. This paper is an attempt to discuss about the latest trend of retelling mythological tales in an altogether new manner, which can be termed as resurgence of Hindu mythology. The authors who are the flag bearers of this latest trend, that has nothing to do with a particular religious belief or for that matter proving something; frankly tell that they have no agenda behind choosing this genre except entertaining. The paper shall bring out the fact that the ancient tales, the mythological stories have been popularised and localised in easy understandable English language. The paper also looks into various perspectives with which they are retelling the known stories from mythologies. The paper shall discuss Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt patnaik and glimpses of Ashok Banker as main authors of this latest trend.

Key words- Mythology, latest trend, ancient tales, resurgence, Indian writing in English

Introduction-

Storytelling forms an integral part of oral communication since ancient times. The art of storytelling has had been in every civilization across the length and breadth of this planet. It is a powerful tool through which one generation passes on the tradition, culture, trends, and customs to another generation. Myth is a belief which **stems out of storytelling**. The origin of this words dates back to the mid 19th century: from modern Latin mythus that has been actually borrowed by the Sanskrit term 'Mithhya' means false or a lie.

The Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary¹ gives 5 meaning to this word-“

1. A traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.
2. A widely held but false belief or idea.
3. A misrepresentation of the truth.
4. A fictitious or imaginary person or thing.
5. An exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing.

The first meaning is what holds the key to the real purpose and content of Myth. If we look into the rest four meanings, we get an idea of what 'Myth' is? It is the very purpose to let the people 'know' of past, seen and the unseen and to create a universal belief without the quest of fact is what makes myth so interesting. Mythology is the collection of these myths. It was present in the oral form before the invention of print, but still one can 'hear' it as 'bed-time' stories. Mythologies contain supernatural characters, supernatural events and legends. It forms the basis of religion of a particular sect as religion is based on belief.

Hindu Mythology-

Mythology runs in our blood. Of all the mythologies present in the world, Hindu mythology is the most vast, elaborate and complicated. Hindus boast of 364 crore Gods and Goddesses. Then we have demons or 'Asurs'. They are present as a form of the necessary evil to show the might of God. Despite being one nation we have various different sect that have their own deities and their mythologies are also structured in such a manner that the listener or the reader HAS TO believe in that particular deities' dominance. So, we have Shaivaites and Vishnavaites. For shaivaites Shiva is the supreme God and for the Vishnavaites Vishnu is the supreme who is the protector of this universe. Shiv Puran and Vishnu puran keep singing the eulogies of both these deities and the two most revered and popular epics Ramayan and Mahabharat are a part of these. Both these epics have kindled, guided and nourished the Indian culture for generations. But here the point is not about the content, but the presentation. The original texts were written in Sanskrit and there were very few who actually mastered this language. That is the reason that both these epic mythologies did not appeal to the masses till it was simplified in different regional language. With the change of language and region the interpretation also changed and nobody bothers about the original as long as it serves the purpose of satiates the blind belief and binds the masses. For example- In Kamban's Ramayan ² (in Tamil) the abduction of Sita by Ravana is depicted entirely different than mentioned in Ramcharitmanas. In kamban's ramayan Ravan cannot touch Sita as she is protected by deadly curse and also that she is a '*par- stri*' or someone else's wife. So, Ravan digs the entire land along with the hut along with and places it on the Pushpak vimaan. Whereas, in Ramcharitmanas, Ravan disguised as a sage; cheats and forces Sita to '*cross the line or the Lakshman Rekha*'. As soon as she crosses the protective line Ravan holds her hand and forcibly carries her in pushpak vimaan. This interpretation varies

from state to state and dialect to dialect. All interpretations and reinterpretations has had thrived in this country. It is this freedom of reinterpretation of our mythologies that has paved path to many authors like Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Patnaik Samhita Ani and few others who are retelling the stories of our mythologies in altogether different form and are not only minting money but also have seemed to have earned huge popularity.

Why is this new narration popular?

In the modern times the youth has moved away from its roots. Most houses now have nuclear families; which means the child grows literary without having much company of his/her grandparents. So, there are no bed time stories and even if they are, they are not from our mythologies as the parent themselves are not fully aware of that. To add to it, there is single child theory and affluence. The child grows up searching for a 'hero' in his/her life. The previous generation grew up in such a way that they referred Hanuman as Monkey god and Ganesh as the Elephant God'. Hanuman was 'Indian-superman'. Ramayan and Mahabharat were strictly the television serials and nothing beyond that. This phenomena was not only in India but also in the west till the modern authors like J.R.R.Tolkien³ and J.K.Rowling⁴ brought back the interest of the Greek mythology, magic and supernatural in English writing and have become hugely popular. The reason of their popularity was that the society was lacking a hero, they were in search of something grand and something that can transform their timid self into something bold and full of valour. Ashok Banker ,Amish Tripathi and Devdutt Patnaik encashed this emptiness of Indian youth and gave them their own hero , their deity a reinterpretation, a whole new look and made them believable. Their stories have brought the 'God' more close to modern generation. Actually they started to act like grandparent the good old 'Dada-Dadi and Nana-Nani'⁵ who narrated stories to their grandchildren about their mythologies. The quest of something grand and larger than life was also evident in the stupendous success of movies 'Bahubali- The beginning and Bahubali-The

conclusion⁶. Everyone knew that the scenes were created with the help of CGI and VFX, the movie took the nation by storm. The reason was simple-the youth of today was tired of being alone, timid and aimless. In the protagonist 'Shivudu' or 'Amredra Bahubali' and his unmatched strength they saw what they want to become, a popular king who is both good looking and supremely powerful.

Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy also presents Shiva not as God but as a common man with lot of muscle power representing a tribe. There is war, their weapons are advanced, the villains are more dangerous and despite all these odds the 'Hero' achieves the objective. The main struggle in Amish's trilogy is the production and possession of a magic drink 'Somras'. The reference of this magic drink which is suppose to provide immortality and take an individual to oblivion is in our mythology, but the author uses it to explore avenues of morality and throws a question to the readers- Should the human quest be after attaining immortality or should they thrive for better life? The characters possess human qualities and that made the novel popular. Sati, Shiva's wife stands by her husband's side in all his decisions, is a fierce warrior, master strategist and an ardent lover. She represents the modern multitasking urban woman.

Devdutt Patnaik's 'The Pregnant King' gives a whole new twist to the LGBT⁷ movement and The author brilliantly brings out the conflict between desire of an individual and social obligation. It also speaks about questions around the idea of gender. The story also tells about a woman who wants to be a king but cannot as she is a woman. Yet she becomes a regent much to the opposition of the clan. This shows the theme of woman empowerment in a mythological story that forms the basis of Mahabharat. Patnayik's Jaya-An illustrated retelling of Mahabharta⁸, Shhikhandi- And other tales they don't tell you⁹ are few books where he has intertwined the popular age old mythology into teaching human management to the modern generation.

In the same line Ashok Banker's Ramayan Series tells the age old Ramayana'10 into a whole new form and talks of post apocalypse, similar to what the youth imagine these days. His Ram is more human and Ravan more dangerous.

Conclusion-

All the three modern mythologists know what they are doing and they are successful because we've been telling our myths in the ways we want to tell them for centuries. There is no single version of a myth and hence the authors bank on our imagination. The reason for their success is the mythologies are retold in English and that the language of the modern youth. They feel connected when they read the mythological characters' struggle and also read their humane qualities. The women in these mythological novels are not threatening but are very powerful. The journey of the protagonist in their novels from universal to an individual is what has made this retelling a success. But above all it serves the single biggest purpose and that is to entertain without preaching. Informing without scaring and imposing. Mythology was and is the most integral form of Hindu culture and the success of these novels tell that it shall continue to do that for generations to come

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5. Hindi terminology for the Paternal and Maternal Grandparents
6. Bahubali- A two part period movie directed by S.S.Rajamouli, originally made in Telugu and later dubbed in Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam.
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