A STUDY OF RETELLINGS IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SITA A BOOK BY DEVDUTT PATTANAIK

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Abstract:

The present study focuses on the retellings in Indian mythology with special reference to the tales of *Ramayana* and how these tales have gone through a change over the years. Mythological works which are actually rigid in nature have been going through many interpretations in the various parts of culture. Ramayana itself has 300 versions of itself.

While we may have seen many different tales and interpretations revolving around the epic *Ramayana*, this particular book of Devdutt Pattanaik retells the epic, drawing attention to the many oral, visual and written retellings composed in different times, different places, by different poets, each one trying to solve the puzzle in their own unique way. The authors today have also tried to change the forms of conventional mythology to address the contemporary issues of today. Even though the retellings are changing with a different face each time the core essence of the story remains the same. There will be a continuous upsurge in the mythological content as long as the faith and culture is intact in the society.

The researcher has tried to study the aspects involving the constant demand for the mythological tales in present generation with a qualitative approach, the aspects been social, political, cultural and commercial. The researcher also has analysed the content varying in the tales of *Ramayana* with special reference to the book *Sita* a book by Devdutt Pattanaik*,* a modern day writer and revival of mythology.

Key Words: Myth, Mythology, Contemporary Literature, Retellings, Postmodern

Introduction

Today, stories have become a very important aspect of our daily lives; they are an inevitable source of communication through various forms in our society. They have existed long before recorded history, and the forms of storytelling have drastically changed over a period of time. From cave paintings to novels, to movies, stories have fascinated mankind. Although the methods have changed, the desire to tell and hear stories has remained unchanged and still greatly impacts the way we look at life.

According to history, the earliest form of storytelling that has been discovered is from the Lascaux Caves in the Pyrenees Mountains in southern France. In 700 B.C., the first printed story, the epic of Gilgamesh[1], was created and spread to other parts of Europe and Asia. The story was carved on stone pillars for all to see, which spread the story around quickly. In the 200 B.C., Aesop's fables were written down as a memory to Aesop, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 500 B.C. A majority of books sold in the early age relied on solid resources for their writings; the resources been witnesses, the communication between families and communities about certain events, travellers, etc.

After the print age, came the electronic age and the age of digital communication where storytelling started to pass through electronic medium of cinema and radio. Television was also introduced in the later stages where families could watch the stories at leisure at their homes. The arrival of cinema and theatre was just not enough when digital communication, that is, communication through internet became popular. The process of e-mails, Google, Yahoo, social media such as Facebook, Youtube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, etc. made it possible for the common society to write online on the World Wide Web.

Mythology in Storytelling:

Myths or Mythology, a tale or collection of tales compiled as an epic or a *purana* have been a source of not only fascination but also inspiration for writers and readers from all over the world. Through generations, different stories in Indian mythology have been passed from generation to generation either by word of mouth or through carefully stored records of the same. The stories in Indian mythology are most effective in powerful messages to the readers and influencing their personality. The intention of Indian mythological tales is to convey subtle facts, rules and laws to guide our daily lives. There are usually multiple stories explaining the same fact, occasion or festival with each version being right in its own merit. It is a result of natural evolution that the stories have passed on through generations. Across geographical differences, myths taken from the *Vedas, Puranas* and the *Itihasas* retain their original intent, adding local flavour in terms of language, imagery, etc.

There has been a remarkable response for these tales in the Indian literary market. These tales have not only created a group of avid readers but have proved as a heritage of Indian culture and preserved it with each retelling. We see that mythology has become a popular genre in English literature as well as Indian television serials which portray these tales in a highly dramatic and fictitious way. While the original source and the story of the past remains the same, the style and the approach has changed, with the characteristics unique to our time. The

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[1] Gilgamesh, originally Bilgamesh, is an Akkadian (extinct east Semiotic language) poem that is considered the first great work of literature, with the protagonist Gilgamesh, a demigod of superhuman strength who is the first Sumerian King.

consumers as well as the producers have become more modern and rational in their outlook towards this genre. People have started to question all the basic plots, the storylines as well as the 'Gods' behind the stories in mythology. They constantly are in search of science and reasoning behind them.

Maybe that is why authors are using epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as their base stories in Indian fantasy fiction and giving it prime importance completely abstaining from the popular fantasies of the west, like 'Harry Potter' or 'The Lord of the Rings'. Authors like Devdutt Pattanaik, Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Ashok Banker, etc. have taken it upon them to answer the unending questions and mysteries behind the mythical tales. These authors have in their way interpreted the epics and revised it in their books be it the "Human *Shiva* and *Sati*" of Amish Tripathi's *Meluha* trilogy, or the rational outcome of Devdutt Pattanaik's characters of "*Sita*" and "*Jaya*". The tales of old Gods and Goddesses may seem irrelevant in today's times but they have become a living source to understand the present, as a number of books by recent authors have to show.

These narratives appear in numerous sagas or trilogies, with the Gods and their counterparts, that is the demons, their fights, the triumph of good over evil, they appear in comic books and graphic novels, they appear in grandeur on the silver screens and in the end when all this fails we see a child somewhere watching *Bal Hanuman* and *Chhota Bheem* as mere cartoon heroes. So what we learn from this is that these mythological tales may have been a museum artefact but they are not yet extinct. They are been revisited again and again and retold in several ways over and over. Myths, world over, have to be critically studied to get a complete understanding of its relevance in the cultural context. Many modern scholars and students dismiss the importance of mythological studies as irrelevant or term it obsolete. But, it can be observed that with the increasing number of avenues available to us, the practice of passing on mythology is very much prevalent today, as never before. It is interesting to note that the audiences for cinemas, theatre-classical, folk and contemporary and even television serials are huge in numbers, if the story or concept is based on Indian mythology.

Vikram Singh (2017) a doctor and an expert in literature has mentioned in his paper in IMPACT, "The mythical stories across cultures are viewed as an embodiment of beliefs, values and philosophies that serves the national interest of the people." In another research done by Dr Pradnyashailee Sawai (2015) in The Context, it is noted by him that pure myth can be retold in any language, any style and in any medium without losing its identity. It is his understanding that the reinterpretation of the tales is the way in which the writers tell us what they exactly feel about that particular story or the narrative.

Amruta Patil, an author of *Mahabhata* in *Adi Parva*: Churning of the Ocean (2012) and *Sauptik*: Blood and Flowers (2016), says, "Mythology is one of the earliest efforts to engage with and document human psychology". Myth has always given a creative impetus to the producers of the content all over. The stories and tales are so magnificent that the authors can display arrays of dynamic and divergent attitudes revolving around the characters and portray them in various lights. This reworking of mythological subject matter through new modes of expression has proved to be an effective strategy that connects one to the cultural past on the one hand and helps to assert the present cultural and socio-political identity on the other. (Nivargi, 2014)

Speaking about *Ramayana* in mythology

"...**Hanuman goes to the netherworld to pick up the ring that has accidentally fallen off Rama's finger. There, the King of Spirits offers thousands of identical rings on a platter and asks him pick 'your' Rama's ring. Hanuman is confused, at which point the King says: 'There have been as many Ramas as there are rings on this platter. When you return to earth you will not find Rama. This incarnation of Rama is now over. Whenever an incarnation of Rama is to be over, his ring falls down. I collect and keep them...''**
(A story from A K Ramanujan's Collected Essays, 1999)

This story is usually told to suggest that for every such Rama there is a *Ramayana*. The number of *Ramayanas* and the range of their influence in South and Southeast Asia over the past twenty-five hundred years or more are astonishing. Just a list of languages in which the Rama story is found makes one gasp: Annamese, Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khotanese, Laotian, Malaysian, Marathi, Oriya, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sinhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tibetan - to say nothing of Western languages.

The core element of the study here is that of the book *Sita,* therefore it is necessary to have a close look at all the research done with regards of this epic. It is said that *Ramayana* has about 300 retellings made in literature. And that is just written literature. The movies, serials, shows, plays, theatre, folk and classical dances, songs, comics and cartoons each has had their own version of the epic over the years, every time bringing in a new angle or a theme with it. It is therefore necessary to study what makes this epic so powerful and special along with the longest written *Mahabhararata.*

One of the famous epics in Hindu literature, the *Ramayana* tells of the life and adventures of *Rama*, a legendary hero who is worshipped as a God in many parts of India. It is one of the largest ancient epics in world literature. Probably written in the 200s B.C., the *Ramayana* is attributed to *Valmiki*, a wise man who appears as a character in the work. Based on numerous legends, the *Ramayana* also incorporates sacred material from the *Vedas*, a series of ancient Hindu religious texts.

Today, the characters *Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Shatrughna* and *Ravana* are all fundamental to the cultural consciousness of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and south-east Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia. There are many versions of Ramayana in Indian languages, besides Buddhist, Sikh and Jain adaptations as well as the South-east Asian countries.

The *Ramayana* is a narrative of considerable length and of enormous religious and spiritual significance across South and South East Asia. The journey of *Ram* is among the most adapted texts of Indian history. From *Valmiki* and his Sanskrit original to *Kamban's Ramayana* evolving into the *Ramakien* in Thailand, the *Ramacharitramans* by *Tulsidas*, it continues to be adapted into unique versions by authors today. The manifestation of the core themes of the original *Ramayana* is far broader even than can be understood from a consideration of the different languages in which it appears, as its essence has been expressed in a diverse array of regional cultures and artistic mediums.

Devi Vandana in her paper for Union Christian University titled "Interpretations and Reinterpretations in *Ramayana* and the Scion of *Ikshvaku*" mentions, "The *Ramayana* does not belong to any one moment in history for it has its own history which lies embedded in the many versions which were woven around the theme at different times and places. Not only do diverse *Ramayanas* exist; each *Ramayana* text reflects the social location and ideology of those who appropriate it."

In a study done on Arts and Theatre by scholar Saswati Saha titled "Performing Alternative Ramayana: A study of the (re)presentation and (re)reading of the Epic in Modern Bengali Theatre" (2017), it is noted how there is a shift in theatre practices in the post-colonial era i.e. the post 1960s. The advent of 'Progressive Theatre Movement" brought about zeal to the experimental theatre in the Indian society.

This paper briefly analyses one such work of modern Bengali theatre: *Mareech Sambad* by Arun Mukherjee, first staged in 1973 by the theatre group named *Chetana* that dealt considerably with the ethical and moral ramifications of the *Ramayana* story. The play uses the trope of *Ramayana* and redefines it to address the issues of class struggle, oppression and plight of the subaltern at the hands of the elites of the society.

The *Ramayana* is an over-interpreted epic where *Sita* is usually a stereotype of a perfect Indian wife. Everyone has positioned her character in that manner is a feminist observation many scholars hold. *Sita* in the *Valmiki* version of Ramayana has been represented as passive, submissive, docile and self-sacrificing woman who is very much devoted to her husband. She unquestioningly follows her husband into exile, and remains devoted to him despite the hardships she has to endure. Due to these qualities which aided patriarchy in creating their own definition of morality of women, *Sita* in *Valmiki Ramayana* was often glorified and idealized as a role model worthy of respect.

The Changing Nature of Stories in Mythology

In the context of Indian mythology and its inextricable relationship with Indian literature, it is very safe to believe that in a country like India where there is not much of a historical tradition – unlike as one finds much in abundance in the Western world-- myth has become a powerful instrument of preservation of both history and culture. (Jhanjhnodia, 2015) C. N. Srinath (2003) rightly argues that such a pervasive, percolated mythical climate has been dynamic in nature with a great potential to merge with and even mould contemporary reality.

The writers today try to en cash the richness of Indian mythology and demonstrate the grandeur in the modern day times. The earliest example would that be of Raja Rao who wrote the novel *Kanthapura* (1938) during the freedom movement. His novel was such that his characters blended in to create awareness among the people against the British. If the *Ramayana* is a narration by saint *Valmiki*, the *Kanthapura* -- with the freedom struggle as the backdrop -- is narrated through the persona of an old woman of the village. The mythical story of *Ram's* victory over *Ravana* runs parallel in the novel only to reinforce the eternal belief in the victory of good over evil. (Jhanjhnodia, 2015)

―**There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *Sthala-Purana*, or a legendary history of its own. Some god or god-like hero has passed by the village – *Rama* might have rested under this papal tree. *Sita* might have dried her clothes, after her bath on this yellow stone, or the *Mahatma* himself, on one of his many pilgrimages throughout the country, might have slept in his hut. (Kanthapura, 5)**

Another example can that be of R. K. Narayan's The Man-Eater of *Malgudi* (1961), an enchanting novel in which the myth of the demon *Bhasmasura* has been explored in order to establish a pattern of certain self-destructing developments in the modern times.

―**Every *Rakshasa* gets swollen with his ego. He thinks he is invincible, beyond every law. But sooner or later something or other will destroy him. He stood expatiating on the lives of various demons in *Puranas* to prove his point‖ (The Man-Eater of *Malgudi*, 84).**

The most popular among the kids of the 60-70s was the comic book series *Amar Chitra Katha* (1967), the first comic books by Anant Pai on mythical tales. Karline McLain, a scholar has done a study "Lifting the Mountain: Debating the Place of Science and Faith in the Creation of *Krishna* Comic Book", which was published in the Journal of Vaishnava Studies (2013). In this research, the author has done an explicit analysis on the writer and artist behind the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics, Anant Pai. Ananta Pai was the first person who denied the use of fantasy in his storytelling though his first thought was to use the script of *Bhagwat Gita* as the basis for the comics.

"With mythology so many things that we read don't seem natural or possible ... You know the story of how *Krishna* lifts the *Govardhan* mountain on his one finger? Well, is this possible? Scientifically it is not. So I didn't show this, there was no image of *Krishna* lifting the mountain. Instead, I just had people talking about it, saying, "Look, *Krishna* has lifted the mountain to shelter us." That way I didn't show anything unscientific, but didn't completely ignore this episode in the story either." (Pai, 1969)

Vikram Singh (2016) states in his content analysis of the Shiva Trilogy (Amish Tripathi) that the different themes in the mythical stories have captivated the readers and authors over generations. Recently, these stories are taking a new shape and blending in with the popular modern culture.

A Man becomes a *Mahadev* where he

fights for good.

A *Mahadev* is not born as one from womb.

He is forged in the heart of battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil.

(Part of *Neelkanth's* message, p.344, The Immortals of *Meluha*, 2010)

Here, it can be noted that Amish Tripathi (2010) has changed the whole concept of God; the God according to him is a human, who has been destined to follow his journey as a leader, to fight the war of good versus evil, who then becomes the God in the eyes of the followers. This whole new light on Shiva, The Destroyer God, became so popular that it became the bestseller, and still runs on the popular charts. (Goodreads, 2014)

Where we have human Gods, we also have many stories that we might not have even heard from the old tales. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Palace of Illusions (2008) is based on *Draupadi's* friendship with *Krishna* which is completely ignored in popular culture. The author has considered *Draupadi* as a woman rather than as a princess stuck with five husbands. (Sawai, 2015)

"...this time I didn't launch into my usual tirade. Was it a memory of Krishna, the cool silence with which he countered disagreement that stopped me? I saw something I hadn't realized before: words wasted energy." – A quote by *Draupadi* in The Palace of Illusions (2008)

It is a clear indication that authors carefully analyse and reinterpret their favourite mythical character by an increase in their dialogue. There are scattered instances – popular guest appearances by *Chhota Bheem* at birthday parties for 10-year olds, the story of *Bahubali* getting a grand response, and the huge amount of YouTube viewers for Sujay Ghosh's short film *Ahalya,* which is the story of Sage *Gautama's*[2] wife, weaving on strains of sexuality and feminism. On the big screens, we have the show *Porus,* a historical show airing on Sony Television showing a larger than life titular character of the *Puru*[3] clan and the reign of Alexander. We have animated movies like *Bal Hanuman,* My Friend *Ganesha* depicting the larger than life characters as small but playing a boisterous role.

Mythology in the Modern & Post-Modern Society

Modern theories on mythology sum up the branch as that which explains the spiritual potential of individuals and societies. Also contemporary theorists say that myths explore common archetypes and explain mind patterns especially in relation to the pairs of opposites like good and bad, virtue and vice etc.

It is a clear indicator that the retellings in mythical tales are an effect or a mirrored image of the period in which they belong. While we have *Valmiki's Ramyana* that pre-dates the ancient era, R.K. Narayan's Ramyana and its short stories in the pre-modern era; we now have new modern and rational concepts in these tales like Amish Triparhi's Scion of *Ikvaku.* These are only some examples but content is been produced over and over again, and every time there is a new face to our well-know stories.

Dr M.M. Nivargi (2014) a professor of English Literature has done research in this field titled "A Brief Survey of Myth and the Contemporary Indian English Novel" which is published in the European Academic Research Journal. He has analysed the content produced in the new English popular novels and how it is a reflection to our growing modern society. According to him there are four layers to this survey; first, these novels are the alternate versions of the popular mythological texts and they present Gods as human beings providing a rational attitude, second, the marginalised voices are given preference in the stories (For example, the characters of *Ganesha* and *Kali* in Amish Tripathi's version of Shiva Trilogy, shown as outcasts), third, there is an attempt to give the women characters their due status and that is why some of the novels make it a point to tell the story from the feminine perspective and finally, these stories are retold not only because of an interest in or a fascination for the mythical past but they also consist of commentaries on the present socio-political situation.

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[2] *Gautama Maharishi* was a *Rigvedic* sage in Hinduism, and also finds mentions in Jainism and Buddhism.
[3] The *Purus* was a clan mentioned many times in *Rigveda*, it locates them at the banks of *Saraswati* River.

Objectives of the Paper

- ✓ To explore different retellings in mythology with special reference to Ramayana

- ✓ To understand the different perspectives of the reader and the author about the retellings with special reference to the book *Sita*

- ✓ To explore the content regarding the various retellings and understand their importance in the present age

3.4 Methodology

The researcher chose the "Exploratory Design" for researching the problem. Mythology is a subject which has been in study over a thousand years, as already mentioned in the previous chapter. This research only tries to further ask the question "how", i.e. how mythology is still alive even though its body is changing? A qualitative research holds the understanding of a phenomenon or situation or an event by exploring the totality of the situation. A closer look at almost all the literary works in mythology (especially Ramayana and Mahabharata) helped exploring the situation of the constant retellings and reinterpretations by the writers from all over the world.

A popular method of qualitative research is that of case study. Therefore, the researcher chose the book "Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana" which delves and digs deep into the epic. As the qualitative research is more of a research based on substantial and extensive literature, the tool that was used was In-depth Interview method with the experts in the field of Literature, Social Sciences and Humanities. The secondary sources included all the books, articles, journals, movies, etc. that is, the already available study material in the field of mythology as well as an interview conducted with Devdutt Pattanaik by ABP Majha on the show *Majha Katta* on 3rd March 2018.

Sita: The Concept, The Content and The Illustrations

Speaking about the book *Sita,* it is a narrative which approaches *Ram* by speculating on *Sita*; her childhood with her father, *Janaka*, who hosted sages mentioned in the *Upanishads*[4]; her stay in the forest with her husband, who has to be a celibate ascetic while she was in the prime of her youth; her interactions with the women of Lanka, recipes she exchanged, emotions they shared; her connections with the earth, her mother, and with the trees, her sisters; her role as the Goddess, the untamed *Kali* as well as the demure *Gauri*, in transforming the stoic prince of *Ayodhya* into God. (Pattanaik, 2013)

It is evident that in this modern day retelling, Pattanaik very carefully captures all the interpretations and representations of *Ramayana* but with the perspective of the wife of *Rama*, *Sita*. There has been a lot of feminist debate going on whether *Ram* had been right while following his *dharma* and abandoning his wife *Sita*. In this light, Devdutt Pattanaik tries to untie the knot, not with a feminist perspective, but clearing out the fact, that it is not a story about good or bad, it is a grey area. It is a story about two lovers, two people who cannot consummate their relationship because they have to follow certain rules and principles.

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[4] *Upanishads*, a part of *Vedas*, are ancient Sanskrit texts that contain some of the central philosophical concepts and ideas of Hinduism, some of which are shared with Buddhism and Jainism.

"...*Sita* watched *Lakshman's* nostrils flare. She felt his embarrassment and rage. She wanted to reach out and reassure him, but she restrained herself. 'You feel your *Ram* has abandoned his *Sita*, don't you?' she asked gently. 'But he has not. He cannot. He is God – he abandons no one. And I am Goddess – I cannot be abandoned by anyone.' A mystified *Lakshman* returned to *Ayodhya*, while *Sita* smiled in the forest and unbound her hair..." (An excerpt from *Sita*: An Illustrated Retelling of *Ramayana*, 2013)

The thought behind choosing this book as the core study for the research is that, the author reveals details in this book; the lesser-known back stories, of *Kaikeyi* as the brave queen who served as the king's charioteer and saved his life, of *Manthara*, a wet nurse to *Kaikeyi*, of *Sita* as an inquisitive and intelligent young girl. The author takes us through the twists and turns of the timeless tale that has evolved over thousands of years, embellished by the regional retellings. He puts forward his interpretation, and that of authors before him – from *Valmiki's Ramayana*, to Sanskrit plays, *puranas*, versions in various Indian languages, in Jain and Buddhist traditions, and in South-east Asia.

Pattanaik's *Ramayana* is not a simple retelling of *Valmiki's* account. It is more than that; the author juxtaposes culture (where society is bound by rules) with nature (where there are no boundaries). He compares *Ram*, king and upholder of rules, with *Krishna*, the kingmaker who bends rules. He brings to our attention symbols and metaphors, motifs and patterns. The writing is powerful and crisp. The *Ramayana* is a tale of emotion – full of affection, loyalty, love, greed, lust and malice. Pattanaik's evocative prose brings out these emotions in all their intensity. The reader is left feeling a deep sense of empathy with the characters.

Most of the researchers till date have tried to find out and analyse the different literary works that revolve around the mythical and historical stories. Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana does not give any reinterpretation in itself but it tells the same story as we know it but from the perspective of *Sita*.

Pattanaik also informs the readers of changes that were made throughout the centuries. He also prods the readers to question the characters, their actions, thoughts and behaviours. He includes different interpretations made by scholars and poets and asks you if it's right or not. Finally, he includes Western interpretations of the story. He mentions how these interpretations have been purposefully exploited in the past to justify British rule in India. He also points fingers to oppressors and politicians who use the stories to justify their campaigns.

4.2 The Experts' Opinions

According to Devdutt Pattanaik in his 2018 interview with ABP Majha, "The word and the meaning are both different things. When human beings receive messages, they look at the words; the words are stronger than the meaning behind it. Similarly, the Ramayana as a whole is a *deha* (body), but you have to look at its *dehi* (soul) to delve with the meaning. The words will be the same in each story, but the meaning and the soul changes every time."

The stories change every time and there is nothing novel about it. Pattanaik tells in his interview that there is no mention of the "*Laksman Resha*" in Valmiki's Ramayana, it was mentioned in the Bengali version '*Krittivasi Ramayana*' 500 years ago, also there is no mention of the story of *Shabri's* berries, and it was written some 300 years ago. Still these stories are considered very sensitive in the Ramayana. He says that retelling mythology is an eternal thing, the authors are practicing the "dharma"; they are maintaining the eternity.

Speaking about the difference between history and mythology, Professor Rahul Meshram talks of how history was introduced in India after the European Renaissance. He says, "Historical discourse is looked upon as what has actually happened, it relies on solid and scientific thoughts and mythological stories do not have any proof. But they are looked upon as legends because they have a cultural backdrop. That is why; the interpretations and the retellings have a value behind it. Just like we have the story of *Bajirao Mastani*, we also have the newest interpretation of *Devdas* as *Dev D* by Anurag Kashyap and the people enjoy it as much as the original story."

Professor Vayjaynti Belsare talks about the change in the stories with the changing society saying, "That is the best feature of any art. Our mythological stories are so diverse, be it *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, that through many regions many stories and interpretations have come up. So it is necessary for that particular story to maintain the flow and continuity."

The researcher spoke both to Aditi Deshpande (as reader of the present generation) and Mrs. Vrunda Kulkarni (as reader of the past generation) who have read the book *Sita* and found out their opinions on the book. According to Vrunda Kulkarni, "The book reveals all the stories from the country and the different cultures which revolve around Sita as the main character which I found very interesting. The story of *Ramayana* is the same, but the thoughts and the language are very different from the older stories. This is not a cultural shock but it is actually creating positivity and maintaining the value system in our society. So I am open to these different retellings that come up in mythology. Each reader will have their own thought behind reading it, each one will interpret it in a different way, but in the end it will always remain a strong form of entertainment."

Aditi Deshpande, who is the reader of the present generation, enjoying genres of fantasy and adventures like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings; is also a big fan of mythology and enjoyed reading the book Sita. She says, "What I liked about Sita the most is the way the author has narrated the same version but from *Sita's* perspective. She is the central theme rather than *Ram*. It is really important because she is portrayed as someone who is very strong with a sense of self-respect. So in the end when *Ram* comes to take her, she does not go with him but instead goes back to her origin." She also talks about how the old retellings had a mystical sense to them, but now the authors are speaking through the youth's language and they are putting some logic and reasoning behind the stories which make them fascinating. "But the most interesting part that we see is how the stories don't lose their magic and still are way popular than other books," she says.

Definition of Truth: Subjectivity and Sensitivity

Devdutt Pattanaik also gives a clear difference between truth and science. He says, "I always write my titles as 'My Gita', 'My Hanuman Chalisa', so there is clear intention behind it that it is my opinion. I have put down the truth and the proof, but it is my thought." This thought addresses the study of this research. The retellings and the reinterpretations are the opinions and truth of the different authors and writers who have written them. It is their version of the story.

The concept of truth is discussed and debated in several contexts; many human activities depend upon the concept, where its nature as a concept is assumed rather than being the subject of discussion. But is truth subjective or objective? According to social constructivists, truth is based on the reality of social systems and the social processes. According to them truth is subject to social experience. So if we look at the mythological texts, they are true in their own form of society. They are constructed based on the values and norms formed through social processes.

So saying that *Valmiki's Ramayana* is the only true version is not entirely a correct statement. Subjectively, the retellings of Ashok Bankar, Amish Tripathi and Devdutt Pattanaik are also true in their own form. In fact, this theory can be traced back to the famous scholar Marshall McLuhan's[5] book The Gutenburg Galaxy where he mentions "how text becomes rigid in its print form". Hence, stories of mythology passed on from generation to generation right from the oral traditions of storytelling are not rigid, but they take a different form each time they are retold by different authors and that becomes their subjective truth.

But still, mythology is quite sensitive in most of the parts of the country especially in the Hindu tradition and culture. For them, there is only one truth and that is God. Many cultures are still not open to what we say "science and logic" behind the Gods of mythology. This can be looked through social, cultural and political biases that arise through society which is very rigid and conservative in nature. But there is still hope when we see all these new storytellers and authors coming up and telling us their versions of truth and we as the audience accept them.

Conclusion:

The basic framework of this study was to explore the works in mythology and how they are retold in different way each time in fashion. The researcher introduced how retellings in mythology started in the initial modern phase and how with time, the nature of the stories started evolving; changing each time. For this the study, the core element was the book Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana where author Devdutt Pattanaik retells the epic from Sita's perspective enlisting all the interpretations of Ramayana like an encyclopaedia.

The study answered the basic problem of the research: The essence of mythology remains intact even if the stories and retellings are changed. There is a constant demand for mythological and historical stories keeping in mind the cultural diversity of the country. Ramayana and Mahabharata have been the top listers ever since their inception. Many authors and storytellers tried to change the face of the story, many introduced different setting and elements

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[5] Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian professor, philosopher, public intellectual, whose major study revolved around media theories

and also different characters, many tried to change the legends into fantasy fiction which made the stories relatable and interesting.

After the success of many novels in the 2000s and their interpretation in the form of movies, many more are lined up in the business. A new wave of METOO (Mythological epics told over and over) is spreading all over and it is creating success in media. It is not just the books or literature that is under the influence of mythology but also the electronic and new media. Many new storytellers have come in the industry that are interpreting and exploring the culture of mythology in their own way; be it on television, films, radio or social media. Of course, these stories are also influenced by the social, economic and political factors in the society.

The reason behind the upsurge in the content of mythology is that today's youth is interested in getting familiar with the "cultural roots". The interest in this genre has sparked by a combination of reasons – the emergence of new readers who have grown up to listening to the stories and now reading it in a language familiar to them, 'a sense of pride in Indian culture as a result of economic successes and the writer's ability to reinterpret the myths to suit modern sensibilities.

But apart from this, what is more intriguing is that there is a universal appeal in the way the stories are narrated right from the character's journey to the end. Changing the mode of narration from the universal to an individual point of view and bringing out the human side of Gods have changed the readers' and viewers' way of looking at them. These characters possess all human emotions; they fight, they bleed and their actions are not driven by a higher purpose. These are some of the things that common people can relate to.

Scope of the Research

This research touched on some specific points of how mythological retellings are told and why the essence of the original story still remains intact. But there can be some more pressing issues that can be dealt with by doing further research. Does this resurgent interest in mythology, whether in fictionalising or interpreting it, account for the increasing pride and heritage? Does this create religious and caste politics? Will these Hindu retellings give rise to more and more political issues?

While we have looked at all the researches and studies done in the field of mythology, it is noted that not much is studied on how and why the stories in mythology are revisited and enjoyed over and over again. Most of the research done in these areas works under the influence of schools of literature, humanities and feminism, but none of these answer the question as to how the essence of these stories remain intact in the hearts and minds of readers. This research will carefully look at these points with a content analysis of the book *Sita*, a book written by author Devdutt Pattanaik. While this book is kind of a backdrop and an encyclopaedia to all the existing forms of *Ramayana*, it also structures how this epic is as important and as real as that of *Mahabharata*.

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