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AN EXAMINATION OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGICAL REINTERPRETATIONS WITH REFERENCE TO SITA A BOOK BY DEVDUTT PATTANAIAK

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Abstract

The primary focus of this study is to examine the retellings of Indian mythology, specifically the stories of Ramayana and the teachings of Gita, and how these narratives have evolved. Despite the rigid nature of mythological works, they have undergone numerous interpretations within different cultural contexts. Ramayana itself has been recounted in around 300 versions.

While we have witnessed various tales and interpretations of the epic Ramayana, Devdutt Pattanaik's book stands out as it not only retells the story but also draws attention to the multitude of oral, visual, and written retellings composed by different poets in different times and places. Each poet has attempted to unravel the puzzle of the epic uniquely. Present-day authors have also endeavored to transform traditional mythology to address contemporary issues. Although the retellings may differ in appearance, the essence of the story remains unchanged. As long as faith and culture persist in society, there will continue to be a constant surge in mythological content.

The researcher has undertaken a qualitative approach to study the various factors contributing to the ongoing demand for mythological tales in the present generation. These factors include social, political, cultural, and commercial aspects. Furthermore, the researcher has analyzed the content variations within the tales of Ramayana, with a particular focus on Devdutt Pattanaik's book, "Sita," which represents a modern-day exploration and revival of mythology and 'Gita' which focuses on the teachings of 'Gita' in a modern context.

KEYWORDS

Myth, Mythology, Contemporary Literature, Retellings, Postmodern

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, stories play a significant role in our daily lives, serving as a vital means of communication across various mediums in our society. Stories have existed since long before recorded history, and their forms have evolved significantly over time. From ancient cave paintings to modern novels and movies, stories have captivated humanity. Despite the changing methods, the innate desire to tell and listen to stories remains unchanged, profoundly shaping our perspectives on life.

According to historical records, the earliest known form of storytelling dates back to the Lascaux Caves in the Pyrenees Mountains of southern France. Around 700 B.C., the epic of Gilgamesh, the first printed story, was created and disseminated across Europe and Asia. The story was carved onto stone pillars, facilitating its rapid spread. In 200 B.C., Aesop's fables were written down as a tribute to Aesop, a Greek philosopher who lived around 500 B.C. In earlier times, many books relied on reliable sources such as eyewitness accounts, oral traditions within families and communities, and accounts from travelers.

With the advent of the electronic age, storytelling transitioned to mediums like cinema, radio, and television. Families could now enjoy stories at their leisure within the comfort of their homes. However, the digital revolution took storytelling to new heights. The rise of internet-based communication platforms, including emails, Google, Yahoo, and various social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, enabled individuals to share their written content online through the World Wide Web.

Myth and Mythology

The use of mythology in storytelling has captivated and inspired people around the world. Whether presented as an epic or a collection of tales known as puranas, myths have fascinated both writers and readers throughout generations. In Indian mythology specifically, these stories have been transmitted orally or through carefully preserved records, effectively conveying powerful messages and influencing the reader's personalities. The purpose of Indian mythological tales is to share subtle facts, rules, and laws that guide our daily lives. Often, there are multiple versions of stories that explain the same fact, occasion, or festival, with each version possessing its validity. As a result of natural evolution, these stories have been passed down through generations, adapting to different geographic locations while retaining their original intent and incorporating local elements such as language and imagery.

The response to these tales in the Indian literary market has been remarkable. They have not only cultivated a dedicated group of readers but also served as a cherished part of Indian culture, preserving it with each retelling. Moreover, mythology has gained popularity as a genre in English literature and Indian television serials, where these tales are presented in a highly dramatic and fictional manner. While the source and the essence of the stories remain unchanged, their style and approach have evolved to reflect the unique characteristics of our time.

Both consumers and producers have adopted a more contemporary and rational perspective when it comes to the genre of mythology. People have started to question the fundamental plots, storylines, and even the deities associated with mythological tales. There is a constant search for scientific and logical explanations behind these stories.

This shift in outlook may be the reason why authors are now utilizing epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata as the foundation for Indian fantasy fiction, giving them prominence over popular Western fantasies like "Harry Potter" or "The Lord of the Rings." Authors such as Devdutt Pattanaik, Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, and Ashok Banker have taken it upon themselves to address the endless questions and mysteries surrounding these mythical tales. They interpret the epics in their way, presenting revised versions in their books, whether it's Amish Tripathi's "Meluha" trilogy with its "Human Shiva and Sati" or Devdutt Pattanaik's rational portrayal of characters like "Sita" and "Jaya." These tales of ancient gods and goddesses may appear irrelevant in today's times, but they have become a living source for understanding the present, as evident from numerous books by contemporary authors.

These narratives can be found in various sagas or trilogies, featuring Gods and their counterparts, the demons, and depicting their battles and the ultimate victory of good over evil. They are also present in comic books, and graphic novels, and captivatingly portrayed on the big screen. Yet, when all else fails, we find children watching Bal Hanuman and Chhota Bheem as mere cartoon heroes. This demonstrates that these mythological tales, although they may be considered museum artifacts, have not become extinct. Instead, they are being revisited and retold in various forms repeatedly.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance of myths, they need to be critically examined. Some modern scholars and students dismiss the relevance of studying mythology and consider it outdated. However, it is evident that with the multitude of available platforms, the practice of passing on mythology is still prevalent today, more so than ever before. It is worth noting that Indian mythology-based stories or concepts draw huge audiences across various mediums, including cinema, classical and folk theatre, contemporary performances, and even television serials.

According to Vikram Singh (2017), a doctor and literature expert, mythical stories from different cultures are seen as embodiments of beliefs, values, and philosophies that serve the interests of the people on a national level. Dr. Pradnyashailee Sawai (2015) further adds, in their research published in *The Context*, that pure myth can be retold in any language, style, or medium without losing its essence. Sawai believes that the reinterpretation of these tales allows writers to express their personal feelings and perspectives on the story or narrative.

Amruta Patil, the author of "Mahabharata in Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean" (2012) and "Sauptik: Blood and Flowers" (2016), asserts that mythology represents one of the earliest attempts to explore and document human psychology. Myth has consistently provided creative inspiration for content creators worldwide. The magnificent stories and tales allow authors to showcase a wide range of dynamic and diverse attitudes within characters and present them from various perspectives. This reimagining of mythological subjects through new modes of expression proves to be an effective strategy, connecting individuals to their cultural past while asserting their present cultural and socio-political identity (Nivargi, 2014).

Speaking about Ramayana in mythology

"...Hanuman goes to the netherworld to pick up the ring that accidentally fell off Rama's finger. There, the King of Spirits offers thousands of identical rings on a platter and asks him to pick your Ramas 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. I collect and keep them..." (A story from A K Ramanujan's *Collected Essays*, 1999)

His narrative is often shared to convey the idea that for every Rama, there exists a Ramayana. The astonishing scope and influence of the Ramayana across South and Southeast Asia over the past 2,500 years or more is remarkable. Just the sheer number of languages in which the Rama story is found is staggering, including Annamese, Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khotanese, Laotian, Malaysian, Marathi, Oriya, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sinhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tibetan, and even Western languages. This epic has left its imprint in various forms of literature, movies, serials, shows, plays, dances, songs, comics, and cartoons, each presenting its unique interpretation or theme.

In the context of this study, the focus is on the book "Sita," which necessitates a close examination of the extensive research conducted on this epic. It is said that there are approximately 300 retellings of the Ramayana in written literature alone, not to mention the countless adaptations in other forms of media. With each iteration, new perspectives and themes are introduced, further enriching the epic's enduring appeal. Therefore, it is essential to explore what makes this epic so potent and distinctive, alongside the longest-written epic, the Mahabharata.

The Ramayana, one of the renowned Hindu epics, narrates the life and adventures of Rama, a legendary hero revered as a deity in many parts of India. As one of the largest ancient epics in world literature, it is believed to have been written around the 200s B.C. and is attributed to Valmiki, a wise character who appears in the work. Drawing from numerous legends, the Ramayana also incorporates sacred material from the Vedas, a collection of ancient Hindu religious texts.

Today, the characters such as Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Shatrughna, and Ravana hold a central place in the cultural consciousness of countries like India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and various Southeast Asian nations including Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The Ramayana has numerous versions in different Indian languages, along with adaptations in Buddhist, Sikh, and Jain traditions, as well as in Southeast Asian cultures.

The Ramayana is a lengthy narrative of immense religious and spiritual significance throughout South and Southeast Asia. The story of Rama has been adapted countless times, with each version adding its unique interpretation. It originated with Valmiki's Sanskrit initially and expanded into Kamban's Ramayana, which later transformed into the Ramakien in Thailand. Tulsidas also contributed to the adaptations with his work, the Ramacharitmanas. Even today, authors continue to create distinct versions of the epic.

The reach of the Ramayana extends far beyond its presence in different languages. Its core themes have been expressed and manifested in a wide range of regional cultures and artistic mediums, showcasing its profound influence and adaptability.

Devi Vandana, in her paper titled "Interpretations and Reinterpretations in Ramayana and the Scion of Ikshvaku" for Union Christian University, highlights that the Ramayana is not confined to a single moment in history, as it has its history embedded in the various versions created around its theme at different times and places. She emphasizes that diverse Ramayanas exist, and each version reflects the social context and ideology of those who interpret it.

In another study by Saswati Saha, titled "Performing Alternative Ramayana: A study of the (re)presentation and (re)reading of the Epic in Modern Bengali Theatre" (2017), the focus is on the shift in theatre practices during the post-colonial era, particularly after the 1960s. Saha highlights the impact of the "Progressive Theatre Movement," which sparked enthusiasm for experimental theatre in Indian society. This movement brought about a new wave of creativity and exploration in the realm of theatrical performances based on the Ramayana.

This analysis focuses on the play "Mareech Sambad" by Arun Mukherjee, a notable work in modern Bengali theatre. First performed in 1973 by the theatre group Chetana, the play delves deeply into the ethical and moral implications of the Ramayana story. It employs the narrative of the Ramayana and reinterprets it to address issues such as class struggle, oppression, and the plight of marginalized individuals at the hands of the societal elites.

The Ramayana has been subjected to extensive interpretation, and one common observation among feminist scholars is that Sita, the central female character, is often portrayed as a stereotype of a perfect Indian wife. In the Valmiki version of the Ramayana, Sita is depicted as passive, submissive, docile, and self-sacrificing, displaying unwavering devotion to her husband. She obediently follows her husband into exile and remains steadfastly devoted to him despite the hardships she endures. These qualities, which perpetuated patriarchal norms and ideals, led to the glorification and idealization of Sita as a role model worthy of admiration in the Valmiki Ramayana.

The Evolving Nature of Mythological Stories

When examining Indian mythology and its profound connection with Indian literature, it becomes evident that in a country like India, which lacks a substantial historical tradition compared to the Western world, mythology serves as a potent tool for preserving both history and culture (Jhanjhnodia, 2015). C. N. Srinath (2003) aptly argues that this pervasive and permeating mythical atmosphere has a dynamic quality that allows it to intertwine with and shape contemporary reality. Contemporary writers recognize the richness of Indian mythology and strive to showcase its magnificence in the modern era. One notable example is Raja Rao, who penned the novel *Kanthapura* (1938) during the freedom movement. Rao's characters seamlessly integrate into the narrative to raise awareness among the people against British rule. While the Ramayana is a tale recounted by the sage Valmiki, *Kanthapura*, set against the backdrop of the freedom struggle, unfolds through the

perspective of an elderly village woman. The mythical story of Ram's triumph over Ravana runs parallel in the novel, reinforcing the timeless belief in the ultimate 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 illustration can be found in R. K. Narayan's captivating novel, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), where he delves into the myth of the demon Bhasmasura to highlight a recurring pattern of self-destructive tendencies in contemporary society.

During the 1960s and 1970s, one of the most popular sources of entertainment for children was the comic book series called *Amar Chitra Katha* (1967). This series, created by Anant Pai, focused on mythical tales and became immensely popular among young readers. Karline McLain, a scholar, conducted a study titled "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* in 2013. McLain's research provides an in-depth analysis of Anant Pai, the writer, and artist behind the *Amar Chitra Katha* comics. Pai, unlike many others, consciously avoided incorporating elements of fantasy in his storytelling. Interestingly, he initially intended to base the comics on the script of the *Bhagavad Gita*, showcasing his commitment to presenting mythology in a more grounded and authentic manner.

"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)

In his content analysis of the *Shiva Trilogy* by Amish Tripathi, Vikram Singh (2016) asserts that the various themes present in mythical stories have continuously fascinated both readers and authors across generations. In recent times, these stories have transformed, assimilating into the fabric of popular modern culture.

***A Man becomes a Mahadev
where he fights for good.***

A Mahadev is not born as one from the 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)

Amish Tripathi (2010) has revolutionized the conventional notion of God. According to his perspective, God is portrayed as a human being who is destined to embark on a transformative journey as a leader and engage in the eternal battle between good and evil. This fresh interpretation of Shiva, the Destroyer God, resonated deeply with readers, resulting in the book becoming a bestseller and maintaining its popularity on the charts.

In addition to the narratives featuring human Gods, numerous stories may have remained unfamiliar to us, stemming from ancient tales. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions* (2008) focuses on the unique bond between Draupadi and Krishna, a relationship that has often been overlooked in popular culture. The author takes a fresh perspective by portraying Draupadi not merely as a princess bound to five husbands but as an individual woman (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)

The evident increase in dialogue surrounding mythical characters indicates that authors are carefully analyzing and reinterpreting their favorite figures. This can be observed through various instances, such as Chhota Bheem making popular guest appearances at 10-year-old birthday parties, the immense response received by the story of Bahubali, and the substantial viewership on YouTube for Sujay Ghosh's short film *Ahalya*, which explores themes of sexuality and feminism within the story of Sage Gautama's wife. Furthermore, on the big screens, shows like *Porus* on Sony Television portrays larger-than-life characters such as the titular figure from the Puru clan and the reign of Alexander. Additionally, animated movies like *Bal Hanuman* and *My Friend Ganesha* depict these grand characters in smaller but vibrant roles (Sawai, 2015).

Mythology, in the context of modern and post-modern society

It is viewed by contemporary theorists as a means to explore the spiritual potential of individuals and societies. These theories also emphasize that myths delve into common archetypes and elucidate patterns of the mind, particularly about opposing concepts such as good and evil, virtue and vice, and so on.

It is evident that retellings of mythical tales are influenced by and reflect the period in which they are created. For instance, we have Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which predates the ancient era, and R.K. Narayan's *Ramayana* and its short stories from the pre-modern era. In more recent times, we see the emergence of modern and rational concepts in these tales, as seen in Amish Tripathi's *Scion of Ikshvaku*. These examples demonstrate that content based on mythology continues to be produced, presenting familiar stories in new and different ways.

Dr. M.M. Nivargi, a professor of English Literature, researched the contemporary Indian English novel, focusing on its connection to mythology. In his study titled "A Brief Survey of Myth and the Contemporary Indian English Novel," published in the *European Academic Research Journal*, he examines how these novels reflect our modern society. The research is divided into four layers.

Firstly, the novels serve as alternative versions of popular mythological texts, portraying gods as human beings and adopting a rational approach. Secondly, there is a preference for marginalized voices in these stories. For instance, characters like Ganesha and Kali in Amish Tripathi's version of the *Shiva Trilogy* are depicted as outcasts. Thirdly, there is an emphasis on giving women characters their rightful status. Some novels present the story from a feminine perspective, highlighting the importance of female voices. Lastly, these stories are not merely a fascination with the mythical past, but they also offer commentaries on the present socio-political situation. According to Dr. Nivargi's research, these contemporary Indian English novels draw from mythology to explore various themes and address the evolving concerns of our society.

The objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To examine various retellings in mythology, focusing specifically on the *Ramayana*.
2. To analyze the different perspectives of both readers and authors regarding these retellings, with a particular emphasis on the book *Sita*.
3. To explore the content of these retellings and understand their significance in the modern era.

The methodology employed in this research was an exploratory design. The researcher aimed to investigate the question of how mythology continues to thrive and evolve despite changes. A qualitative research approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. A thorough examination of literary works, particularly the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, was conducted to explore the ongoing retellings and reinterpretations by writers worldwide.

Sita: The Concept, The Content, and The Illustrations

To focus the research, the book "Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana" was selected as a case study, delving deep into the epic. In-depth interviews were conducted with experts in the fields of Literature, Social Sciences, and Humanities, serving as the primary research tool. Secondary sources such as books, articles, journals, movies, and an interview conducted with Devdutt Pattanaik by ABP Majha on the show Majha Katta on March 3, 2018, were also utilized as valuable study materials in the field of mythology.

The book Sita takes a unique narrative approach by focusing on the character of Sita and exploring her experiences throughout the Ramayana. It delves into various aspects of her life, including her childhood with her father Janaka, her time in the forest with her husband Rama, her interactions with the women of Lanka, and her connections with nature and her divine role as a goddess. Devdutt Pattanaik, the author, carefully incorporates different interpretations and representations of the Ramayana, but from Sita's perspective.

The retelling of the story through Sita's viewpoint allows for a deeper exploration of the feminist debates surrounding Rama's actions and his adherence to dharma, particularly his abandonment of Sita. Pattanaik aims to unravel this complex issue by presenting a more nuanced understanding. Rather than taking a strictly feminist perspective, the book acknowledges that the story is not simply about good versus bad but exists within a gray area. It highlights the tale of two lovers who are unable to fully consummate their relationship due to the constraints of societal rules and principles.

"...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 reason for selecting the book Sita as the focal point of this research is the author's ability to uncover lesser-known details and backstories within the narrative. These include the portrayal of Kaikeyi as a brave queen who served as the king's charioteer and saved his life, the role of Manthara as Kaikeyi's wet nurse, and the depiction of Sita as a curious and intelligent young girl. Through the book, the author takes readers on a journey through the intricate twists and turns of the timeless Ramayana tale, which has evolved over thousands of years and has been enriched by various regional retellings.

By examining interpretations from different sources, including Valmiki's Ramayana, Sanskrit plays, Puranas, versions in different Indian languages, as well as Jain and Buddhist traditions, and the Ramayana's influence in Southeast Asia, the author presents his interpretation alongside those of previous authors.

Pattanaik's rendition of the Ramayana goes beyond a simple retelling of Valmiki's original account. It explores the contrasting themes of culture, where society adheres to strict rules, and nature, which knows no boundaries. The author draws comparisons between Ram, the king who upholds rules, and Krishna, the kingmaker who bends them. He skillfully highlights symbols, metaphors, motifs, and patterns within the narrative. Pattanaik's writing is powerful and concise, effectively conveying the emotional aspects of the Ramayana, which are filled with affection, loyalty, love, greed, lust, and malice. Through his evocative prose, readers develop a profound sense of empathy for the characters.

While previous researchers have predominantly focused on analyzing different literary works based on mythical and historical stories, Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana offers a unique perspective. Rather than providing a reinterpretation, the book presents the familiar story from the viewpoint of Sita.

Pattanaik also sheds light on the changes that the story has undergone throughout the centuries. He encourages readers to question the actions, thoughts, and behaviors of the characters. The author incorporates various interpretations by scholars and poets and prompts readers to reflect on their validity. Additionally, he discusses Western interpretations of the story and reveals how they have been exploited in the past to justify British rule in India. Pattanaik also raises awareness about oppressors and politicians who manipulate these stories to support their agendas.

In a 2018 interview with ABP Majha, Devdutt Pattanaik expressed that words and their meanings are distinct entities. He noted that when humans receive messages, they tend to focus on the words themselves, as words hold significant influence. Pattanaik drew a parallel to the Ramayana, stating that while the entire epic can be seen as the body (deha), it is essential to delve into its soul (dehi) to grasp its true meaning. He emphasized that although the words remain the same in every rendition of the story, the meaning and essence behind them evolve with each retelling.

According to Devdutt Pattanaik in his interview, stories change with each retelling, and this is a common phenomenon. He provides examples such as the "Laksman Resha" mentioned in the Bengali version of Krittivasi Ramayana and the story of Shabris berries, which were not present in Valmiki's Ramayana. Despite their absence in the original text, these stories hold great significance in the Ramayana and are considered sensitive. Pattanaik believes that the practice of retelling mythology is an eternal endeavor, as authors are upholding the eternal nature of these stories by engaging in them.

In terms of the distinction between history and mythology, Professor Rahul Meshram highlights how history emerged in India after the European Renaissance, emphasizing its reliance on solid and scientific evidence. In contrast, mythological stories are regarded as legends without concrete proof but possess cultural significance. This value attributed to interpretations and retellings is exemplified by contemporary adaptations like "Bajirao Mastani" and "Dev D," which are enjoyed alongside the original stories.

Professor Vayjaynti Belsare discusses the evolving nature of stories in response to changing society, highlighting the diverse interpretations and regional variations that have emerged within mythological tales like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The maintenance of flow and continuity in each particular story is considered essential in capturing the essence of these narratives.

The researcher conducted interviews with Aditi Deshpande, representing the present generation of readers, and Mrs. Vrunda Kulkarni, representing the past generation, to gather their opinions on the book "Sita." Mrs. Vrunda Kulkarni expressed her fascination with the book, highlighting how it reveals stories from various cultures associated with Sita as the main character. While the core story of the Ramayana remains the same, she appreciated the different thoughts and language employed in this retelling. She viewed these variations as positive and valuable in maintaining societal values, without considering them as a cultural shock. Mrs. Kulkarni embraced the diversity of retellings in mythology and recognized that each reader will interpret them differently, ultimately finding them to be a strong form of entertainment.

Aditi Deshpande, representing the present generation of readers, shared her enjoyment of fantasy and adventure genres like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings. As a mythology enthusiast, she found "Sita" to be a compelling read. Aditi appreciated the narrative's unique perspective, placing Sita as the central theme rather than Ram. She valued how Sita was portrayed as a strong character with strong self-respect. Aditi particularly noted that when Ram came to take her back, Sita chose to return to her origin instead. She also highlighted the author's approach of using logic and reasoning in the retellings, which she found fascinating. Aditi found it interesting that the stories retained their magical essence and remained highly popular among readers, despite being presented in a language that resonates with the youth.

Devdutt Pattanaik also distinguishes between truth and science, stating that his titles, such as "My Gita" and "My Hanuman Chalisa," reflect his own opinions and perspectives. In this research, the focus is on the opinions and truths expressed by various authors and writers through their retellings and reinterpretations.

The concept of truth is a subject of discussion and debate in various contexts, and its nature can be considered subjective or objective. Social constructivists argue that truth is shaped by social systems and experiences, and in the case of mythological texts, they are true within their respective societal contexts, reflecting the values and norms formed through social processes.

Therefore, claiming that Valmiki's Ramayana is the only true version is not entirely accurate. Subjectively, the retellings by authors like Ashok Bankar, Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt Pattanaik also hold their truths. This aligns with the idea presented in Marshall McLuhan's book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, where text is seen as becoming rigid in its printed form. Mythological stories, on the other hand, evolve and take on different forms with each retelling, representing the subjective truths of the respective authors.

However, mythology remains a sensitive topic in many parts of the country, particularly within Hindu tradition and culture, where there is often a belief in a single truth associated with God. Some cultures may not readily accept the scientific and logical explanations behind the mythological gods. This resistance can stem from social, cultural, and political biases embedded in rigid and conservative societies.

Nevertheless, there is hope as new storytellers and authors emerge, presenting their versions of the truth, and audiences embrace these diverse perspectives.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine how mythology is retold in different ways over time. The researcher explored the evolution of retellings in mythology, starting from the early modern phase to the present day, with a focus on the book *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* by Devdutt Pattanaik. In this book, the author presents the epic story from Sita's perspective, encompassing various interpretations of the Ramayana like an encyclopedia.

The study addressed the central issue of the research: that the essence of mythology remains intact even when the stories and retellings change. There is a consistent demand for mythological and historical stories, taking into account the cultural diversity of the country. Ramayana and Mahabharata have always been highly regarded, and many authors and storytellers have attempted to transform these tales. They have introduced different settings, elements, and characters, even transforming them into fantasy fiction to make the stories relatable and captivating.

Following the success of numerous novels and their adaptations into movies in the 2000s, more projects in this genre are being pursued. A new wave of "METOO" (Mythological epics told over and over) is sweeping through different media platforms, leading to widespread popularity. Mythology has not only influenced books and literature but also electronic and new media. Many storytellers in the industry, whether on television, films, radio, or social media, are exploring and interpreting the cultural aspects of mythology in their unique ways, while also being influenced by social, economic, and political factors.

The surge in mythology content can be attributed to the interest of today's youth in reconnecting with their cultural roots. The genre's popularity has been fueled by a combination of factors: the emergence of new readers who grew up listening to these stories and now enjoy reading them in a familiar language, a sense of pride in Indian culture resulting from economic successes, and the writer's ability to reinterpret myths to suit modern sensibilities.

What is particularly intriguing is the universal appeal of the storytelling, from the character's journeys to their ultimate outcomes. Shifting the narrative perspective from the universal to the individual and portraying the human side of the gods has changed how readers and viewers perceive them. These characters experience a full range of human emotions, engage in battles, and suffer, with their actions being driven by personal motives rather than a higher purpose. These aspects resonate with ordinary people and contribute to the enduring popularity of these stories.

Scope of the research

This research has touched upon certain aspects of mythological retellings, examining the preservation of the essence of the original stories. However, other pressing issues could be explored through further research. For example, does the resurgent interest in mythology, whether through fictionalization or interpretation, contribute to a sense of pride in heritage? Does it also give rise to religious and caste politics, and potentially generate more political controversies? While existing research in the field of mythology has focused on various areas such as literature, humanities, and feminism, there hasn't been much investigation into why and how these stories continue to be revisited and cherished by readers. This study aims to address this gap by conducting a content analysis of the book *Sita*, written by Devdutt Pattanaik. This book serves as a comprehensive reference to the diverse forms of the Ramayana and highlights its significance and authenticity, comparable to that of the Mahabharata.

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