

THE REBIRTH OF MYTH: REINTERPRETING INDIAN MYTHOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

¹Dr. Om Prakash Tiwari, ²Kanchi Bajpai, ²Alka Singh, ⁴Nelshon Tirkey,
⁵Alka Shukla and ⁶Dr. Rajkumar Singh

¹Associate Professor, Department of English, Dr. C.V. Raman University, Bilaspur (C.G.)
^{2,3,4,5} Research Scholar, Dr. C.V. Raman University, Bilaspur (C.G.)
⁶Principal, JES College Farhada, Bilaspur (C.G.)

Abstract

Throughout literary history, mythology has served as an inexhaustible wellspring of inspiration and subject matter. Successive generations of writers have engaged in the act of reinterpretation, seeking to breathe new life into established narratives and offer novel perspectives on timeless tales. The contemporary literary landscape in India witnesses a vibrant resurgence of this practice, spearheaded by a "new breed" of authors like Amish Tripathi, Ashok Banker, and Ashwin Sanghi. These writers boldly experiment with the genre, weaving elements of mythology into diverse literary modes, particularly the realm of fantasy. This innovative fusion results in the modernization of Indian myths, making them resonate with a contemporary audience while preserving their inherent cultural significance. This research delves deeper into the approach of Amish Tripathi to this time-honored practice. It aims to situate his stance within the broader context of retelling Indian mythology and assess his unique contribution to the field of Indian literature written in English. The analysis primarily relies on a close textual examination of Tripathi's renowned Shiva Trilogy, scrutinizing his reinterpretation techniques and their impact on the reader's understanding of ancient myths.

Keywords: Shiva Trilogy, Amish Tripathi, Myth, Mythology

Literature is an ever-changing process. In every social formation, new forces emerge over long periods of time while old forces remain intact even after the new forces become dominant. The Indian writers in English contemplated their ancient past in nourishing literary art. To capture the ethos and sensibilities of India they went back to the rich heritage of India. Indian writing in English has developed into a plethora of interconnecting genres that carry with them the simplicity of the Indian lifestyle and the complexity of Indian beliefs in an adopted language, English. The introduction of the English language in the Indian literary scene has changed the face of almost every genre, ranging from drama, thriller, romance, tragedy to non-fiction and poetry. Authors today are striving to interpret and rewrite old stories so that they can become more conceivable and relevant for the current audiences.

Gone are the days when Indian English writings were termed derivative and initiative: it has achieved an independent identity today. From Tagore to Naipaul, Indian English has garnered international recognition. Thanks to colonization, followed by the English education at schools and colleges, English fiction is on the rise both in terms of readers and writers. Today, when our cities get hold of the Westernized trends, readers especially the youth, find it easier to relate themselves to English novels than the novels in mother tongues.

The new young writers such as Priti Shenoy, Chetan Bhagat, Amish Tripathi, Durjoy Dutta have given a new face to Indian fiction in English. In these books we find characters that are like ourselves and speak in a language similar to what we speak in our day to day lives. English fiction in India has reached a new phase of development, i.e., the rise of popular literature- a literature for the common people by the common people. The English fiction in India has broken the glass walls of elitism, which we find in the works of Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and the other writers of their age, and has burst upon the Indian market to drench the middle class of our emerging economy with the dreams, aspirations, fears and disappointments of their own lives.

For the past few decades, the practice of retelling of mythology in literature, especially in Indian Writing in English has undergone remarkable changes catering to the expectations of the modern readers. Mythology has been an inevitable source and subject of study in literature down the ages. Regardless of the criticisms and accusations directed towards myths questioning its authenticity and validity, writers have been practicing reinterpretation of mythical stories. The main reason for this unquenchable interest of the writers in mythology is to figure out the meaning of their present in relation to their ancient past. This common practice of retelling mythical stories involves reconstruction of stories and characters in accordance with the context. Recently the new breed of writers like the Amish Tripathi, Ashok Banker and Ashwin Sanghi are experimenting the mythology genre by blending it with the other modes of writing. For instance, Ashok Banker and Amish Tripathi have blended mythology with fantasy mode. With this kind of implementations these writers are modernizing the Indian myths. The research paper explores Amish's stance in this age-old practice in a larger spectrum and his contribution to Indian Writing in English. The texts such as *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013) would be analyzed in order to fictionalize Shiva as a human being. Further, it comprises of close textual analysis of Shiva Trilogy with reference to the practice of retelling of Indian mythology.

The thrust in the more recent times, however, has been to fictionalize gods in human form, thus bringing them closer to people. With the new generation of writers approaching mythology as an entity and a genre, it has grown in terms of content and form. The contemporary writers make use of mythical framework in its complete form with historical settings, mythical characters and themes to explore its scope. In order to contain it within a larger framework epic narrative is inevitable. Amish Tripathi falls in line with this tradition. His Shiva trilogy is a mythical fantasy based on the imagination of the mythical god Shiva in a human form. Amish states that he wants to imagine Shiva as a human being who walked on this earth and eventually rising into a god. It is based on the construction of the existence of Indian mythical God Shiva as the legendary figure in 1900 B. C. That is the premise of the Shiva Trilogy, which interprets the rich mythological heritage of ancient India, blending fiction with historical fact. The search for the meaning of evil is the theme that runs through these three novels. Writing in and for the free, globalised, techno-rich and techno-savvy India of the twenty first century, Tripathi's target readership is the huge strata of English-speaking and reading Indian youth. His narrative strategy mixes linear and cyclical, so there is a sense of continuity and discontinuity of the previous mythical narrative.

The writers like Amish Tripathi and Ashwin Sanghi with zeal for creativity widened the scope of this genre in the Indian publishing industry. The works of these writers have retrieved mythology from extinction. The long-forgotten „heroic age“ captured through epic narrative has

been revived by these contemporary writers. To make it more enticing and appetizing to the contemporary audiences the writers have spun mythology with fantasy. The cult of the „heroic age“ encapsulated in the epic form ended with the concept of „realism“ forging its way into literature. Epic fantasy can be considered as the predominant factor behind the resurgence of this age-old practice in literature. Amish Tripathi has taken a lead in Indian fictional writing by deconstructing the old-age myth of Shiva and providing it a new perspective in Shiva Trilogy.

The trilogy is the celebration of an epic hero „Shiva“ and his journey. Shiva has been depicted as a man of flesh and blood who rises himself up to the level of a god by his deeds. It has analyzed how the conventional treatment of the myths has been reshaped through focus on the rational representation of technology, the civilized lifestyle, convincing relations and the journey of a man from a Tibetan tribe towards becoming Lord Shiva. The author has tried to keep the protagonist as human as possible to the point where Shiva introspects about the mistakes that he made in his past life and his total reluctance to be called the chosen Neelkanth, the Destroyer of Evil. The novels show how Shiva as a mortal being acts as a saviour and guides people through his wisdom. Amish through his novel *The Immortals of Meluha*, has also tried to vindicate that Lord Shiva was not an imaginary character from mythology but a person from the history. He has also taken Vedic concepts from the scripture and presented in this novel in the form of science. Amish has used this liberty in reconstructing the mythic stories and characters the way he intended, and wanted his readers to take the lead. He acknowledges this view in the interview published in the *Culture* magazine as, “These books are purely fiction. I write the story the way it comes to me... This is my interpretation. That’s the beauty of India. Except for the last 200 years; the tradition of modernizing and liberalizing has been there for long” (10).

Amish Tripathi has added little „masala“ to certain elements to make the novels more appealing. The depiction of various events and places and landscapes in Shiva Trilogy aesthetically appeal the senses of the readers by carrying them into a new world of imagination. The beautiful portrayal of the city of Meluha, Devagiri and Ayodhya lends a new charm. His unique combination of crackling story-telling, religious symbolism and profound philosophies aesthetically appeal to one’s mind. Amish has made a good effort in portraying a myriad of emotions and distributing them proportionately among characters. The employment of various Greek war strategies, the manifestation of martial art by Ganesha as a warrior and the passionate emotional bond of Shiva and Sati are the some approaches used by Tripathi to attract the readers. There is also the „bollywoodization“ of the emotional scenes. One sample is of a seriously injured Sati lying in Shiva’s lap, bloodied and muddied, and through shaking lips and drooping eyes mouthing the words „I love you“ to an inconsolably weepy Shiva as arrows whiz past them in conceivable slow motion.

In Shiva Trilogy, Tripathi carefully lays out locales that are picture-perfect as in children literature. Rewriting myth also takes shape of a conspiracy novel that re-reads a long-established set of codes, unlocking it with a new cryptographic-historical key, unearthing the “truth” from a cobweb of lies. In addition to revisionist history, the conspiracy novel erects a substitute edifice of intriguing codes and conventions. For example, Tripathi’s attempt to re-present Shiva as a soldier-hero is a revisionist one with certain features of a conspiracy novel. However, new quasi mythopoeic, quasi-scientific explanations that replace the age-old interpretations of Shiva’s blue throat, Sati’s death by fire or Ganesh’s elephant-head engender a new rubric of myths. Old myths

have been replaced by new concoctions. The description of the concepts like „somras“ and „blue throat“ appeals to the rational reader. Romance and thrill are the main subjects and there is abundant application of action, suspense, humour, twists, betrayal, tragedy, and agony. The writer has employed common, everyday English with too much Americanism and expletives like „bloody hell“, „damn it“, „bullshit“, „holy lake“ etc. in order to make Shiva look more human.

In this age of demythologization and re-mythologization, Amish has firmly established a fictionalized historical account in Indian fictional writing by rendering the recreation of the traditional myths through the means of the fantasy mode in the Shiva Trilogy. In a way, Amish has broken the conventional treatment of the myths by the early Indian writers. Contemporary writers have revolutionized Indian Writing in English in order to acquaint Indian audiences with the heritage of India. Ashwin Sanghi in an interview with Rohit Panikker, states the reason for the transformation as, “The Indian fiction scene is going through a generational change. We have finally shed our colonial hang-ups where the target audience is Indian. The readers want to read more about their own roots” (The Times of India).

References

- Abrams, M.H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. United States of America: Heinle and Heinle, 1999. Print.
- Doty, William G. Myth: A Handbook. United States of America: Greenwood Press, 2004. Print.
- Stableford, Brian. The A to Z of fantasy literature. United States of America: The Scarecrow Press, 2009. Google Book Search. Web. 02 March 2016.
- Thogai, Ezhil A. “Modernising the Indian Myths: Amish Tripathi’s Shiva Trilogy.” IJELLH 2.1(2014): 377-85. JSTOR. Web. 25 Feb. 2016.
- Tripathi, Amish. Immortals of Meluha. New Delhi: Westland Ltd, 2010. Print.
- Tripathi, Amish. The Secret of the Nagas. New Delhi: Westland Ltd, 2012. Print.
- Tripathi, Amish. The Oath of the Vayuputras. New Delhi: Westland Ltd., 2013. Print.
- Tripathi, Amish. “Man and the myth.” Interview by Lakshmi Pillai and Snehal Khandekar. Young Changemakers conclave. DNA Shadow Editorial Board. 1 Feb. 2014. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.