Indian Myths in New Avatar: A Comparative Study of Amish Tripathi's Immortals of Meluha and Ashwin Sanghi's The Krishna Key

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Abstract

Indian myths have become an immense source for many contemporary novelists. Recently a new group of novelists, like Amish Tripathi, Ashok Banker and Ashwin Sanghi, thrived in their novel writings using Indian mythological stories. They have been interpreting mythology and presenting it in a modern way that could have attracted a wide readership. The novelists like Amish Tripathi and Ashwin Sanghi have become masters of rehashing mythology and presenting alternative history through their novels respectively. *Immortals of Meluha* from the *Shiva Trilogy* repackage and redistributes the story of a very popular mythical figure Lord Shiva in a more humanised way. He and other Godly figures are presented as extraordinary humans. Comparatively, *The Krishna Key* is a very different novel in terms of approach. It tries to prove the historicity of *The Mahabharta*, particularly the existence of Lord Krishna and his incarnation as *Kalki Avatar* in *Kaliyuga*, by proposing to present many contemporary shreds of evidence and research in support to it. Their reception of wide readerships attracted academicians to look into the texts.
The present article will try to study Immortals of Meluha by Amish and The Krishna Key by Sanghi comparatively and also attempt to analyse the fiction produced by these both in the light of contemporary trends in Mythological fiction in India.

Keywords: Popular Fiction, Mythological Novels, Contemporary Novels, Historical Fiction, Readerships.

Introduction

The history of Indian English novels has not been untouched or vacated records of novels based on Indian myths and history. Indian English novelists have been writing such novels since the beginning. We find many novelists who have ventured Indian history and portrayed mythical characters in their novels. The novelists used to pick up historical places, characters and events from Hinduism, taking us back to ancient India. Few novelists have assimilated the narrative style of Katha Vachan, narrating epically. Like *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao, *Waiting for Mahatma* of RK Narayan, and the novels by Mulk Raja Anand. They have explicitly used the historical account into their novels. On the course of time, many novelists applied their hand on such novels that directly dealt with Indian religious characters, events, place and relate them to the day-today scientific innovation and the things prevalent today. They do it in such a way that quenches the sensibilities of readers. Over time, many novelists came into intense exposer and began writing more novels based

on myths and religious driven characters and events assimilating into day-to-day realities. They are presenting Gods and Goddess as an extraordinary human form. Fictionalising the characters and places and making them anew that touches the readers' sensibility the most.

Now the readers in the era of capitalism and globalisation have burning fascination for the entertainment equivalent to the foreign country. They are looking for the Indianized version of superhero and a touch of contemporariness. The novelists like Amish Tripathi and Ashwin Sanghi have tried their best in writing novels based on Indian myths and history. They have come up to serve the only entertainment. However, they also, bringing the readers into the spellbound of their writings, attempt to justify or prove scientifically what they taking up the events, places and magic-bound into their novels. Thus, the new form of writing novels based on religious scriptures and history has emerged since last few years. Ashwin Sanghi has succeeded as an author of this folk. Although, the novelist himself does not claim that the relationships between facts and fancy are true to his best of knowledge. Ashwin Sanghi has declared in the disclaimer of Krishna Key:

"Historical, religious or mythological characters, events or places, are always used fictitiously" (The Krishna Key 1).

However, the outcome of such writing affairs has brought a revolution in the field of writing novels in contemporary India. Readers, equally, on the same queue for the reading such novels. The readers are seeking for the alternatives of the superheroes in science fictions as they find in the British and American novels. This area has emerged as a new for the writers and readers as well. The significant authors, like Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi, Ashok Banker, Devdutt Patnaik, Anand Neelkanthan, *and* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, many more in the queue, are fictionalising Indian myths. For them, Indian myths have a lot to explore and exhibit before the readers to take them into an ancient world which has relevancy in the contemporary era. These myths are tales used to pass generation to generation orally in ancient India. Nowadays, novelists are retelling and weaving plausible stories out of these myths. Here novelists are applying their artistic approach to acquaintance the contemporary readers with Indian myths:

"Myths – stories of gods, heroes, and great cosmic events – are told in all of the world's many cultures. They deal with the deepest, most fundamental issues: the creation of the universe and of the human race, the nature of the gods and spirits, what happens to us when we die, and how the world will end" (Wilkinson).

Ashwin Sanghi's Treatment of Myths and History

Ashwin Sanghi used Indian mythology to prove the historicity of *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata*. He writes novels using history and myths in quite a different way from his contemporaries. His writings are an outcome of intense research. His researches try to relate the linkages between ancient times and day-to-day events. He believes that history has not been outdated, so there is always room for the past in the present. His novels present the thesis that ancient India is still vibrant in the present era. Sanghi also posits that contemporary India has all those things recurring in a different way than we find in the past. We have Krishna and Chanakya in the country and societies, but people need to recognise them by going back to ancient India. In contemporary India, many personalities resemble historical figures. The teachings of Chanakya are echoing today and being taught by labelling with new terms in our educational institutions. Those ethics and ethos are timeless and relevant in contemporary India.

Similarly, his treatment of mythical sources is based on an extensive study. His novels are full of research and have arguments in support of the historicity of mythical sources. For example, *The Krishna Key* is full of research and fact-finding, which the novelist used to prove the historicity of *The Mahabharata*. For this novel he went through many historical shreds of evidence, research findings and plausible theories to blend the mythical stories so that it appears real and believable.

The characters like Ravi Mohan Saini as a research guide and Priya as a research scholar who will work to prove the historicity of the mythological stories bring the novel anew to its kind. Besides these two characters, Dr Nikhil Bhojraj, the symbolist who discovers a seal from the submerged *Dwarka*, Prof. Rajaram Kurkude is a nuclear research scientist, Devendra Chhedi, the genetics expert are major characters involved directly or indirectly in contributing information related to the historicity of *The Mahabharata.* The novelist caricatured the group of extraordinary characters who brings an alternative history and theory before the readers who will find the novel realistic and believable.

Sanghi treated the mythology with a logical explanation. He vested the writing faculties to process the Hindu epics to make the readers believe that these epics are nothing but historical accounts. By doing so, he presents these as more relatable, believable, rational and truthful out of the Hindu epics under the shed of fictional premises. For example, Sanghi compares Shiva Lingam with the structure of BARC (Bhabha Atomic Research Centre) structure:

"The cylindrical structure that you see in the picture of BARC is the core nuclear reactor. Its shape is identical to the cylindrical structure of the Shiv Lingam" (The Krishna Key 41).

He used a fictional medium to transform the popular stories of Hindu epics into a non-fictional record that makes his novel really interesting for contemporary readers. For this transformation, he used the writings of prominent historians who have attempted to present the events of *The Mahabharta* as true by giving many archaeological facts. Sanghi ardently wants to bring these mythological events from the book-shelf of mythology to history:

"What excites me is not the mythology but the possibility that the epic may be based on historical truths, said Sanghi who further added that The Krishna Key is his quest to provide an entertaining read while attempting to nudge the Mahabharta and the character of

Krishna from the mythology section of the library into the history section" (Sanghi interviewed by Mukherjee).

1.Amish Tripathi's Repackaging Myths in Shiva Trilogy

Amish Tripathi born in Mumbai and brought up in Odisha, and has done MBA from IIM Calcutta. In the beginning, he worked as a banker but gave no work satisfaction. He heard the heart and pursued the inherited spirit from his father and grandfather to explore the Indian myths by modernising it. (citation needed) Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* which comprises of The *Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of the Nagas, and The Oath of the Vayuputra*s. It has brought a tremendous reception and established him as one of the celebrated novelists from the contemporary galaxy of authors. Ashwin Sanghi comes from the same folk as the authors like Ashok Banker and Devadutt Pattnaik come. The authors who used to write based on Indian myths and history, they have a technique of retelling Indian myths in a very engaging manner. Amish has research on Indian myths and works on the possible stories out of these myths. In an interview, he asserts that:

"My approach is: What could be the plausible story behind the myth? For instance, the myth about Sati is that she jumped into a sacrificial fire. Another version is that she died of a self-created fire. What could have given rise to these myths? My theory is that she was shot by a poisoned arrow that creates a fever that never breaks and eventually consumes you" (Baliga).

Amish Tripathi recreates, reconstructs, and repackages Indian myths to entertain the readers. He tries to weave a plausible story out of Indian Hindu Myths. Humanisation is the central idea of most of his novels. He presents godly figures in the form of humans. Gods and Goddess as characters are presented like the common man. They act like an ordinary man. They have no magical or miracle power to set things right in no moments.

Tripathi believes that the Gods and Goddesses were not magical beings rather they were like very ordinary people and used to live the life of the common man. They got the status of Gods because of their *Karma:*

*"I am no miracle worker. I cannot snap my fingers and cause bolts of lightning to descend on the Chandravanshis." (*Immortals of Meluha 13*)*

At the beginning of Immortals *of Meluha,* Shiva is presented as a member of the Guna Tribe from Mount Kailash. He lives in a hut in a very ordinary village. He did not have a luxurious life like a king.

He is capable of reading the nerve of readers; that's why he kept his writing accessible to the readers of non-literary background, i.e., deployed plain language and engaging narrative:

"Tripathi seems to have been inspired by Ashok Banker but his language is rather prosaic and shorn of literary beauty" (Batra).

He has followed the fads and fashion of popular culture that counts the masses. He confesses himself that he is not such a writer who is stick to the hard and fast norms of literary work. Perhaps he might have been inspired by Ashok Banker; he follows his way to reach in the public domain. During one of his interviews of The Hindu, Shashi Baliga, the reporter asks about his writing style by comparing him with Devdutt Pattanaik, in response he says that:

"I have a simple writing style and I am happy to keep it that way. The literary crowd might not approve, but that's all right by me. Keep in mind that, thousands of years ago, Valmiki's Ramayana became the popular version because he wrote it in a very simple style. I want to keep my style real and approachable" (Baliga)

He, explicitly, asserts that his writing style is not a traditional, preferably he has his approach of writing that covers the sensibilities of masses and finally he enjoys it by doing so.

Shiva Trilogy

Shiva Trilogy comprises of three novels, *The Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of the Nagas, The Oath of Vayuputras.* The trilogy written in sequence, in sequel manner, the first, *The Immortals of Meluha,* then the second, *The Secret of Nagas*, and the last, third, *The Oath of Vauputras. The Immortals of Meluha* is the first novel of Shiva trilogy. This novel uses the Gods as characters from the Hindu religion. It takes us back to ancient India and has mentioned many current Indian geographical locations that give a touch of realism. The character Shiva from Kailash, a leader of a tribal group who, later in the novel, becomes Mahadeva. He comes to Meluha and becomes Meluhan for a while to fight a war against Chandravanshis. Shiva is allured by the beauty of Sati, a *Vikarma,* daughter of King Bhadra of Meluha. Meluha kingdom is expected to follow the footprint of Lord Rama, i.e. there was a strict law and order that must be followed by each and every one including King himself. However, Meluhans, despite advanced technology, scientific innovations and medical system, is under frequent threat of Terrorist and supposedly Chandravanshis. The Meluhans Kingdom could not fight fiercely due to many codes of conduct during the war and within the kingdom, like ostracising of Vikarama people considering them untouchables. And the one whosoever comes in the contact of this Vikarma needed to undergo Sudhikaran. Therefore, Meluhans had a prolonged wait for *the Neelkanth*, and the arrival of Shiva ends this prolonged waiting. Shiva happens to be Neelkanthan due to drinking *Somras*. Meluhans have immense faith on Mahadev, to liberate from the incessant threat terrorist. Mahadev, in the beginning feels odd and not ready to accept the responsibility whole heartedly. He felt the system of Meluha very rigid and old drawn principle that has become outdated in order to curb the coming adversities.

Conclusion

They are using the chunks of religious scriptures or characters or story and so on. There are many novelists nowadays who are writing novels on the same line. The other minor novelists who are also using history and myths relating them to day-to-day realities receiving good reception from the readers. They have, purposely, come forward to work upon allusions, fictionalised, retelling, fabricated scriptures of Hindu religious holy books.

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