THE MODERN RETELLING OF INDIAN MYTHS AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

In the Modern society, one can witness the emergence of myths and mythological thinking in almost all spheres of thought irrespective of the concept of modern man and his consciousness or with society as a whole or individual institution. A myth is a story that has significance to a culture, or it is the story that addresses fundamental and difficult questions that human beings ask: Who / What am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? How should I live? What is the right thing to do? What is the universe? How did it all begin? A culture’s mythology is a powerful tool for psychology, casting light on the culture’s shared unconsciousness. There is no better way to understand a culture deeply than to know and appreciate its mythos, its stories, and its dreams. The aim of this work is to make a comparative study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s The Palace of Illusions and Amish Tripati’s Shiva Trilogy, and moreover to analyses how these works make use of the myths in new perspectives.

KEYWORDS: Myth, mythology, womanhood, feminism & Transformation of individual etc

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are always in search of truth, for that they often look into the past in order to find answers to their questions. History and Myth proves to be great sources for all these answers. Literature always uses these myths and history to get answers to the unresolved queries. Especially, Indian Literature often blends truth, fiction and reality all together with the use of myths in order to get a deeper understanding of mankind.

Myths are the stories which are narrated with an imaginative touch, explaining the truth about the universe. Indian English Literature, too, is enriched with the stories drawn from the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Epics etc. These myths have been transmitted from one generation to another in the form of stories. With relevance to myths, Elina Helander Renevall says,

Regardless of how we define myths, the myths are available to us. In their daily lives, people often search for explanations for their existence and Identity, for their origins of their activities, for the plans of gods and for certain truths to emerge. Myths are able to give answers that modern knowledge system cannot afford to give in. In Postmodern times and beyond, myths help to stretch the boundaries prevailing worldviews and modes of thought. (9)

The retelling of myths in various works also helps in continuing the rich tradition. Myths often help these writers to project their personal, social and political issues in mythical disguise. In every genre, extensive use of myths is found. In Indian Literature, writers like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Amish Tripati, Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni and many more reflect the mythical thoughts in their works.

In the recent times The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and the Shiva Trilogy by Amish Tripathi deserve a special mention. Both these works make use of myths in a new perspective. The Palace of Illusions revisits the epic from the perspective of Draupadi and in the Shiva Trilogy, Amish portrays Shiva’s transition from a normal human being to that of a God.

The Palace of Illusions, in the perspective of Draupadi, takes one through her journey as a child born from fire, to her marriage to the Pandava brothers, to her witnessing of the Kurukshetra war and finally, to her journey to the Himalayas along with her husbands in renunciation of the world, whereas the Shiva Trilogy is based on the imagination of the mythical god Shiva in human form. It shows the transformation of Shiva as an ordinary human being who, once, walked on this earth and finally had risen into a god. The search for the meaning of evil is the theme of these three novels.

Divakaruni’s The Palace of Illusions attempts to portray the story from the perspective of one of its heroines Draupadi, highlighting the relationship between womanhood and vengeance and thereby, displaying the struggle for identity in a mythological context. The theme of gender relations is also inherent in the epic. 1) Fighting one of the main gender distinguishing activities – the masculine ideal – is represented by the virile husband and fearless warrior who is complementary to the concept of a loyal, devoted wife. 2) The other instance of femininity showing women as important contributors to their husband’s success. However, both these roles are restrictive and represent women in relation to their men folk.

According to critics, Draupadi is of a conflicting nature. She, on the one hand, is seen as a perfect wife, chaste, demure and devoted to her husbands but at the same time, is shown as intellectual and assertive too. This novel has brought very contemporary questions to discuss in this scenario where the woman are playing very important role in the society, nonetheless, they are being treated like the ‘Second Sex’ and are unable to find a common ground equal to men (Simon deBeauvoir,1949).

The novel begins with a Tibetan tribal Shiva, who, along with his tribe, is invited to the Meluha kingdom which is ruled by Suryavanshi kings. The Meluhans are always at war with the Chandravanshis aided by cursed tribals, the Nagas of their savior Neelakanth. Shiva turns out to be the Neelakanth as his throat turns blue after consuming the healing potion Somras. Shiva falls in love with Sati, the Suryavanshi king Dasha’s daughter. As she is considered as a vikarma, (carrier of bad fate, due to sins committed in the previous birth), he is not allowed to marry her. And during his visit to the priest he came to identify that his task is to find out “what is evil” (23) and discovered that the Chandravanshis considered the Suryavanshis as evil and have been expecting him to eliminate that evil. In The Immortals of Meluha, the supernatural aid will appear first in the form of the “somras” (19), the drinks of the Gods and also this supernatural aid comes in a later period of the story when Mithra convinces Vayuputra to grant Shiva the Pushupathastra that can destroy any specific target one aims at. However, the first instance in which the aid is in the form of Somras suggests that he is the prophesied redeemer Neelakanth (because of his throat turning blue). In The Oath of Vayuputras, Shiva discovers that the somras is the true evil. He even announces a holy war and in the end Shiva and his associates are being popularized as Gods for their deeds and accomplishments.

The first book The Immortals of Meluha begins with the introduction of Shiva as a Tibetan warrior. He enters into the city of Meluha to rescue the people from the attack on the Chandravanshis. Then he realizes himself as the Neelakanth,
an incarnation of Mahadev. It signifies that one does not always need to suppress or react to vices on the while one needs to modify these negatives and make them effective. He even breaks the system of Vikarma (women giving birth to still born or having some diseases) and marries Sati, the Princess.

In the second book, Shiva acts as a rescuer and fights against evil. At the end of the novel, the battle is not only to banish the evil, but also to destroy one’s mentality based on evilness. Shiva, in a way, accepts that ignorance is the evil and he suggests them to love each other and it is the only solution. In this novel, Shiva commands that one should not judge anything or anyone and realize that every good has some bad in it and every bad has some good qualities in it, one’s consciousness is the only way to differentiate and find them.

In the third book, the idea that excess of everything is bad. Even an excess of goodness can be bad is expounded. Life is a journey of everyman towards the righteousness. It motivates one to think deeply. Amish creates Shiva as a normal man and he makes one to think. People believe that the right way to reach God is to choose the right path, and realize the righteousness of humanity. It makes one realize that the writer tries to find the answers to all those hidden questions inside human beings.

According to the Hindu mythology, Lord Shiva is a ferocious god, and he has another mysterious side as a normal being and is also the image of peace, and meditation. The concept of mythology is converted into a tale enhanced by beauty of the retelling and makes it more interesting. This is a brave attempt of epic proportions and descriptions. According to the view of a religious follower, it is difficult to accept Shiva as a normal human being. The definition of what is right and what is wrong is very difficult to justify, because something which is wrong for one can be right for someone else.

It is apt to compare these books to today’s world through strength, fate, pain, sorrows and corruption. As a result, the perception of a person makes something appear to be wrong or right. The human knowledge is different from the divine knowledge. One is very familiar with human knowledge, but one dedicates oneself to the completeness of eternal thinking and self realizing, and thus can get the divine knowledge forever. Thus, the human beings also can achieve the peak of divine knowledge. They can accept the universal truth by self realization. The retelling of the myths and the alternate history that they project enables one to achieve this self realization.

Instead of looking at the god figures with doubt and indulging oneself in customary practices of worship, it is better to identify the earthly elements in them. Such an identification will enable one to see the man behind the god, the earth behind the heaven, and give us an insight into those noble acts that enabled them to rise up to the stature of god. The trilogy strives to uphold the basic virtues needed to lead a noble life. In the Shiva Trilogy, Shiva is able to understand that people are different from the ideology, but that does not mean that they are wrong. The Devas and the Asuras are different. The Asuras are not evil because they are different. It is the fact that the Devas judge them wrongly. Similarly, the Nagas are not evil; they are exploited by who seek reversal and their just appraisal is labeled evil by Devas. The real philosophy of God figures become visible to one only when one looks at the possibility of their human existence. This clarity is achieved only when these figures come down from the Heaven to the Earth through these rewritings.

Through her retelling Divakaruni portrays Panchali, as a strong, determined and dominant figure. There is an attitude of revolt against injustice within her. The writer is actually blending her feminist approach with her Great Indian Myth. She wants to elucidate that how these writers attribute certain qualities to women. Hence, she tries to reexamine
these women characters and cast them in a new light. Thus the novel draws our attention to the present day problems of women and also it depicts the emergence of women which indeed changes the course of history. At this juncture, myth functions as a new voice for feminism. Thus both these works direct one’s attention to the present day scenario and also provides one with some solutions.

REFERENCES