



09

A STUDY OF MYTH IN PATNAIK'S *SITA: AN ILLUSTRATED RETELLING OF RAMAYANA*

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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. 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 analyzed 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.

Keywords: *Myth, Mythology, Contemporary Literature, Retellings, Postmodern, etc.*

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, 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.

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.

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.

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; 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, 2).

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.

...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... (Sita, 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.

The basic framework of this research paper study is 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 encyclopedia.

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