

MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGES IN MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE: PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

This article delves into the phenomenon of “new Indian mythmaking,” a term coined by us to describe the literary works by authors of the 21st century. Focusing on the reinterpretations of the “Ramayana” by prominent writers such as Kavita Kané, Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt Pattanaik, the analysis unravels the sociocultural functions of myth within the context of contemporary Indian literature. Despite providing material for reflection and analysis, “new Indian mythmaking” offers a pseudo-spiritual understanding of Hindu philosophical aspects and presents ancient values to a mass consumer audience in alignment with the needs of contemporary society.

Keywords: culture, cultural memory, interpretation, mythology, faith, morality, good, evil, cognition, being, philosophical turn, personality, values, society, spirituality.

Relevance of Topic. In recent decades, India has witnessed the emergence of literary works with plots rooted in ancient myths. The functions and forms of such texts diverge from traditional ideas. Mythology is undergoing transformation and adaptation to new conditions. Thanks to modern authors, literary horizons are expanding. Contemporary issues, such as encompassing matters of cultural, religious, and national identity, sociocultural creative practices, as well as moral and ethical guidelines, are examined from a new perspective. This phenomenon is observable in the literature of various countries and nations, with India being no exception. We will delve into the transformation of myth within the literary genre, which we have termed “new Indian mythmaking.”

The relevance of the topic under study from a philosophical standpoint can be attributed to several factors. The process of myth-making in modern literature reflects profound traditional knowledge through the lens of contemporary perspectives, representing a transformation of cultural memory. The examination of such works enables us to comprehend how ancient philosophical concepts ingrained in myths can impact the framework of business, leadership, management, education, the evolution of feminism, etc. This genre also exerts influence on the worldview of modern individuals and society at large, enhancing the understanding of the philosophical dimensions of culture and providing material for reflection and analysis. As a result, the interpretation of the myth leads to its transformation.

The article **aims** to undertake a philosophical analysis of mythological images in modern Indian literature, employing the example of “new Indian mythmaking.”

Source Base. The source base of our research rests upon the works of several contemporary Indian writers, known for books that can be attributed to

“new Indian mythmaking.” The work is focused on modern Indian books, which include “Sita’s Sister” by Kavita Kané, “Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku” by Amish Tripathi, and “Leader: 50 Insights from Mythology” by Devdutt Pattanaik [Kané 2014; Tripathi 2022; Pattanaik 2017]. These works are great examples of a discernible quest for new meanings and details, which facilitates the transformation of classical mythology and addresses the evolving needs of society. Such adaptations encompass socio-economic, moral and ethical, existential, and aesthetic interests. Hence, we have grouped books of writers with distinct literary styles, exploring diverse themes with a preference for various genres, under the common name of “new Indian mythmaking.”

Aligned with this objective, we have outlined several **objectives**, including:

- Highlighting the principal sociocultural functions of myth in contemporary Indian literature;
- Determining the values introduced by the myth-making in India;
- Analyzing how modern myth-making contributes to addressing current issues within Indian society.

The appearance of the “new Indian mythmaking” phenomenon, as well as its widespread influence, raises numerous potentially philosophical questions that captivate the scientific community, extending interest both within Ukraine and beyond its borders. Does myth represent a historical phenomenon or a cultural universal that can manifest at any time? Does literary myth-making signify the evolution or decline of myths? Is it possible to modify myths under the influence of contemporary globalization and multiculturalism, or should they remain unaltered?

The theoretical framework within our research comprises the works of contemporary Ukrainian philosophers. These works enable us to conduct a philosophical analysis of the chosen issues within a universal intercultural context, covering aspects such as cultural memory, cultural values, personal spirituality, sociocultural existence, etc. We draw on the insights provided by Zoia Atamaniuk, Yevhen Borinshtein, Olena Kolesnyk, Viktor Levchenko, and Irina Sumchenko [Atamaniuk 2022; Borinshtein 2017; Kolesnyk 2014; Levchenko 2022; Sumchenko 2022].

In India, mythology, religion, and culture have always been connected. Nevertheless, despite the evolution of new Indian mythmaking and its impact on cultural identity and socio-cultural aspects of society, the number of studies focused on modern novels with a mythological component is small. Among contemporary Indian researchers of diverse backgrounds exploring the theme of mythology in popular culture are Vikram Singh, Prafulla Kumar Mohanty, Sanika Kulkarni, and others [Singh 2016; Mohanty 2003; Kulkarni 2020].

Mythology represents a distinctive form of cognition and perception. Myths have a great influence on the development of various domains such as art, literature, and filmmaking. Authors and directors, drawing inspiration from mythological narratives, create unique stories that transmit cultural heritage or offer a fresh perspective on it. The preservation of traditions and cultural memory, as well as the generation of innovative ideas, are crucial aspects of the cultural

development of society. These factors are frequently interrelated, and the balance between them contributes to the evolution of culture and the advancement of society. Among the key functions of myth observed in modern literary mythmaking, we would like to emphasize the following ones:

1. **Preservation of Cultural Tradition and Cultural Memory.** This function contributes to the preservation of values for future generations.

2. **Innovation and Creativity.** By inspiring new ideas and providing diverse forms of self-expression, myth contributes to the dynamic evolution of culture. This function creates an environment conducive to the continual existence and relevance of myth in the modern world.

3. **Compensatory Function.** It involves the modeling of an idealized past, generating new material for reflection.

Revisiting the central theme of this article unveils the significance of myths as foundational elements in India's cultural legacy. Heroes and deities woven into the tapestry of Indian mythology stand as role models while analyzing the behavior of evil characters helps people avoid mistakes and keep away from potential missteps. The eternal struggle between them helped in the formation of concepts of good and evil. It can be seen in the "Ramayana," a famous Indian epic, to which many modern Indian authors turn. Through the lens of their literary creations, we will see how the writers transform the famous epic and what functions of myth capture their creative focus.

Let us commence by remembering the foundational narrative of the "Ramayana," preserved within the collective repository of cultural memory and retellings. At the heart of this venerable epic stands Rama, an avatar of Vishnu and the quintessential paragon of virtue. Initially designated as the rightful heir to the throne of Ayodhya, Prince Rama's destiny takes an unexpected turn when Queen Kaikeyi, the second wife of his father King Dasharatha, demands Rama's banishment to the forest for fourteen years. The narrative introduces Sita, Rama's wife, as the epitome of devotion and femininity, as well as the archetype of an exemplary spouse. Her admirable qualities are highlighted when she willingly forsakes the opulent comforts of palace life, choosing to accompany her husband into exile. This arduous journey is enriched by the presence of Rama's younger brother, Prince Lakshmana.

A pivotal moment in the "Ramayana," which influenced the plot of the epic, is the abduction of Sita by the rakshasa Ravana. The search for Sita and the consequential battle in Lanka serve as poignant exemplars, underscoring the intrinsic values of love and devotion. It also demonstrates the eventual triumph of virtue over malevolence and the restoration of justice.

After that, Rama and Sita live in the Kingdom of Ayodhya. They confront a challenging period marked by growing doubts among the populace regarding Sita's purity. The pregnant Sita is exiled to the forest, where she gives birth to twins. This decision stems from Rama's recognition that the duty of a ruler to his people (raja-dharma) supersedes his obligations as a husband. In adherence to the principles of piety, Rama undertakes a strenuous path, marked by hardship and adversity.

The themes of the “Ramayana” remain in many contemporary forms today. The epic has undergone numerous cinematic adaptations. Modern storytellers create literary works, drawing inspiration from the plots and characters of the epic. Subsequently, through an examination of the aforementioned authors, we will deep into the phenomenon of literary mythmaking to learn how it catalyzes for the evolution of mythic forms. Frequently, mythological elements are retained but modified.

The creation of new allegories allows writers to express new ideas and unearth fresh meanings within myths, which offer a new perspective on contemporary sociological, philosophical, political, and other pertinent issues. As observed by Vikram Singh, “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” [Singh 2016: 147]. Such an approach mirrors the functioning and transformation of cultural memory, which contributes to the cultivation and fortification of cultural identity, the preservation of traditions, and the transmission of information across generations.

Contemporary authors often refrain from immersing in the classical Sanskrit texts, confining their exploration to English translations of epics. This phenomenon reflects a dual process of modernization and westernization in modern Indian mythmaking. Regrettably, this trajectory leads to the loss of profound meanings and components entwined with language and culture. A deliberate reduction occurs, which is a consequence of the conscious simplification of texts. Among the noteworthy contributors to “new Indian mythmaking” are Kavita Kané, Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt Pattanaik. These authors embody versatile personalities, enriched by extensive experiences across diverse spheres of life.

Kavita Kané, born in 1966, holds a postgraduate degree in English Literature and Mass Communication at the University of Pune. Embarking on a career in journalism, she contributed her talents to media houses such as Magna Publications, Daily News and Analysis, and The Times of India, before ultimately redirecting her focus towards the realm of writing. In her works, there is the discernible fortification of the feminist component, as well as the preservation of traditional and cultural memory and the compensatory function of the myth.

Amish Tripathi, born in 1974, stands as an esteemed author, banker, and diplomat from India. A graduate of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, his professional journey has spanned the financial sector, encompassing roles at Standard Chartered Bank, IDBI Bank, and Development Bank of Singapore. Beyond the realms of literature, Amish Tripathi has served in diplomatic capacities, notably as the Minister of Culture & Education at the High Commission of India in the UK, and as the Director of The Nehru Centre in London. Often named the “India's Tolkien,” Amish Tripathi's literary endeavors prominently feature the function of preservation of cultural tradition and cultural memory.

Of particular academic interest is Devdutt Pattanaik, born in 1970, an eminent Indian writer and mythologist renowned for his prolific literary contributions, encompassing more than fifty books. He graduated from Grant Medical College in Mumbai, worked in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector, and simultaneously contributed articles for various magazines. Devdutt Pattanaik then delved into the realm of mythology, obtained a degree in Comparative Mythology from Mumbai University, and devoted his time to writing books. His certain works manifest a keen observance of the function of preservation of cultural tradition and cultural memory, while others exhibit an emphasis on the function of innovation and creativity. Devdutt Pattanaik pioneers new interpretations, seamlessly situating ancient myths within contemporary realities. This transformative approach facilitates an understanding of the enduring value of ancient traditions, offering insights applicable to various facets of modern life, including business, leadership, management, and education.

Let us undertake a comprehensive examination of the literary works of the above authors to discern the profound implications of modern Indian mythmaking and its consequential impact on the societal fabric in India.

1. Feminism and Gender Equality in the Mythological Works of Kavita Kané

Within the novel “Sita's Sister,” Kavita Kané artfully unfolds the narrative of Urmila, the younger sister of Sita and spouse of Lakshmana [Kané 2014]. In the canonical Valmiki's “Ramayana” and other traditional renditions of the epic, the role of Sita's sister remains largely missed. Kavita Kané, however, offers a compelling reconsideration of this heroine, redefining her significance within the broader mythological context.

In Kavita Kané's rendition, Urmila emerges as a formidable and independent character, who knows her boundaries and finds her place in a male-dominated world. The author meticulously accentuates Urmila's virtues, emphasizing her courage, intellect, and vitality. “Sita's Sister” paints a vivid portrait of a protagonist who, in direct opposition to prevailing patriarchal norms, ardently advocates for women's rights. Urmila's intellectual pursuits include her comprehension of the Vedas and Upanishads, her active participation in conferences alongside her father King Janaka, and her engagement in profound dialogues on philosophical and religious matters. She is unafraid to assert her perspective within a complex and patriarchal societal framework.

In Kavita Kané's book, Urmila is an ambitious princess adept not only in the intricacies of state affairs but also in the delicate art of familial cohesion amidst conflicts. Urmila ardently defends her sister while fearlessly critiquing the actions of Rama. She wonders why Rama stood up for all the women who were condemned by society (Tara, Mandodari, and Ahalya), but could not protect Sita from public censure. This discerning inquiry, among various other scenes depicted in “Sita's Sister,” encapsulates the formalization of women's quest for equality and shows the transformation of Urmila from a passive participant to an active protagonist. Such a transition from contemplative to active is a significant step in the development of a minor character.

Kavita Kané discerningly focuses on the female experience within Indian society, thereby invoking pertinent issues about feminism. Through an adept exploration of the destinies of female characters embedded in myth, Kavita Kané unfolds narratives that are underscored by a distinctly feminist perspective. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that contemporary Hinduism encompasses a multifaceted spectrum of opinions and approaches concerning the feminist dimension within the religious framework. Kavita Kané revisits Hindu texts, meticulously highlighting facets that espouse gender equality and fostering a nuanced dialogue on the role and representation of women within the framework of Hindu mythology.

2. Fantastic Novels by Amish Tripathi Based on Indian Mythology

Amish Tripathi's remarkable literary contributions, situated within the framework of Indian mythology, merit scholarly examination. His novel "Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku" [Tripathi 2022] is the first book in the "Ram Chandra Series". Amish Tripathi's works, inspired by the "Ramayana", are dedicated to the individual stories of the protagonists of this epic, and the first book tells the story of Rama. His books serve as a reflective mirror of dynamic realities, contain an educational function, and have a positive impact on the moral and ethical values of modern people. "Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku", enriched with mythological elements and didactic moral lessons, is suitable for adults and teenagers. Amish Tripathi also introduces situations that resonate with the exigencies of contemporary existence. His novels act as conduits, guiding intrigued readers toward the traditional versions of the epic.

Even though "Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku" is based on the "Ramayana," Amish Tripathi introduces noteworthy departures from conventional versions of the epic, which are seen from the first pages of the novel. Unfortunately, the scope of this article will not allow us to analyze all the differences, but we will focus on two of them.

While prevailing beliefs typically position the birth of Rama as a blessing for Ayodhya, Amish Tripathi diverges from this norm by depicting it as a sad event, marking the day when King Dasharatha suffered defeat in a battle against Ravana. The prince, despite facing aversion from his own family, harbors an unwavering belief in the transformative potential of society. Amish Tripathi's narrative framework engenders a more profound and complex image of Rama, depicting him as a character steadfast in adhering to dharma, irrespective of the societal and personal tribulations that unfold around him.

Amish Tripathi's Sita's personality deviates significantly from the traditional archetype. In "Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku", Sita emerges as a dynamic character characterized by a proclivity for conflict, adept swordsmanship, etc. Amish Tripathi deliberately seeks to reevaluate the conventional image of Sita as a modest and obedient princess, presenting her in a more contemporary light. By imbuing Sita with attributes that align with modern sensibilities, such as pride, independence, and a keen awareness of her boundaries, the author aspires to create a relatable and empowering representation, that will resonate with a diverse readership.

If you replace the names of the characters from the “Ramayana” with others, Amish Tripathi’s work can be called a science fiction novel. Playing with traditional myths, modern authors create fantasy worlds with unique interpretations, new characters, and plot changes. In this way, they manage to highlight current social issues, as well as add novelty and originality to their works. They inject fresh perspectives into age-old questions surrounding faith and morality, contemplations on being and mortality, and reflections on the dichotomy between good and evil and offer it to modern society. The thematic exploration of spirituality undergoes a profound metamorphosis, scrutinized through the lens of novel realities and values. This phenomenon gives rise to a form of pseudo-spirituality, capable of distorting traditional religious and mythological concepts.

Amish Tripathi’s innovative approach serves as a conduit for readers to engage more intimately with characters, fostering a heightened sense of relatability. On the one hand, this approach may be seen as desacralizing traditional myths within the context of established traditions and cultural memory. On the other hand, it unveils a positive dimension when considered in the context of addressing contemporary sociocultural issues. Accepting the fact that in such books spirituality and sacredness are minimized, then the interpretation and innovation of ancient texts is a productive process.

3. Devdutt Pattanaik’s Business Approach to Mythology

Devdutt Pattanaik’s investigation undertakes a nuanced exploration of the confluence of Hindu mythology on contemporary business philosophy, inaugurating a distinct chapter within modern Hinduism and heralding a philosophical turn in epic mythology. Analyzing the behavior of epic heroes, he creates the projection of similar situations into modern realities. The expert elucidates the essential attributes of an authentic leader, delineates strategies for ensuring organizational success, and provides guidance on appropriate professional comportment within the workplace.

Devdutt Pattanaik’s “Leader: 50 Insights from Mythology” [Pattanaik 2017] weaves short stories that seek to draw parallels between the behaviors of renowned characters from ancient Indian epics and those exhibited in the context of contemporary business communication. An illustrative instance is found in the chapter titled “Strategic Intent of Ravana”, where Devdutt Pattanaik endeavors to correlate the principal figures of the “Ramayana”, Rama, and Ravana, with two modern corporate directors, Trilochan and Asutosh, conceived by the author. In this chapter, Trilochan is depicted as possessing “the money to buy anybody who stands in his way” and “the political clout to get all the clearances” [Pattanaik 2017: Chapter 17]. He is admired by everyone, “Trilochanji’s organization is in awe of him” and “everyone fears him” [Pattanaik 2017: Chapter 17].

Devdutt Pattanaik draws a comparison between Trilochan and Ravana, and Asutosh and Rama, characterizing the former as “flamboyant and commanding”, noting the latter is “boring and task-oriented” [Pattanaik 2017: Chapter 17]. This juxtaposition highlights the stark contrasts in their personalities, with Rama exemplifying a focused and task-centric approach while Ravana is portrayed as craving public admiration and displaying narcissistic tendencies. While both

Ravana and Rama share formidable qualities in terms of power, strength, and business acumen, their divergent social attributes underscore a radical distinction.

Devdutt Pattanaik concludes his discourse with the assertion that “in Hindu mythology, a leader is not one who rules a city of gold or travels on a flying chariot”, but “one who lives to make a positive impact on the lives of others” [Pattanaik 2017: Chapter 17]. Here it is necessary to disagree with Devdutt Pattanaik and make a reservation about what a leader can be. For example, a leader does not have to be positive and steer individuals toward benevolent goals. It often happens that many leaders are dark personalities and advocate destructive ideologies, steering individuals toward detriment. In the realm of leadership, ethical and moral considerations become pivotal. Grasping the principles of positive leadership not only mitigates the risk of power abuse but also fosters a sense of societal responsibility.

Devdutt Pattanaik proposes a multidimensional model to elucidate the relevance of mythology in contemporary contexts. Rooted in Hindu mythology, his discourse accentuates the significance of ethical principles, particularly in the realm of business. Analyzing aspects of leadership through the lens of ancient Indian wisdom, Devdutt Pattanaik addresses the ideas of transcendence and personal development. His interpretations of myths and epics contribute to a nuanced understanding, offering distinctive perspectives that resonate with diverse audiences, encompassing both children and adults.

Conclusions. In our analysis, we focused on the works of different authors, aiming to illuminate various dimensions of modern myth-making and underscore the sociocultural roles myths play in influencing and addressing issues within Indian society. We have identified the following sociocultural functions of myth: the function of preserving cultural tradition and cultural memory, the function of innovation and creativity, as well as the compensatory function.

Upon thorough analysis, it becomes evident that in the chosen dimension of our inquiry such as literary creativity, myth predominantly assumes a cultural rather than a strictly historical phenomenon. The continual adaptation of myth across time underscores the evolution of human thought and is a reflection of shifting worldviews and societal needs. “New Indian mythmaking” serves as a poignant indicator of changes within the cultural context, effectively bridging tradition and modernity. The simplification and creation of pseudo-spiritual works grounded in epic mythology exemplify notable commercialization and dissemination of popular culture to a wide audience. This creates new conditions and challenges for discourse surrounding the nature of myth, its transformative dynamics, and the cultural practices of “new mythmaking” in modern society. The philosophical foundations of such a discourse deserve closer examination.

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Марія Рижик

МІФОЛОГІЧНІ ОБРАЗИ У СУЧАСНІЙ ІНДІЙСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ: ФІЛОСОФСЬКИЙ АНАЛІЗ

Ця стаття присвячена «новій індійській міфотворчості» – саме таким терміном в позначили літературні твори письменників 21-го століття, в яких спостерігається трансформація індійського міфу. На прикладі аналізу реінтерпретації «Рамаяни» сучасними індійськими письменниками Кавітою Кане, Амішем Тріпаті та Девдаттом Паттанаїком ми виділили основні соціокультурні функції міфу в сучасній індійській літературі. Серед них: функція збереження традиційної та культурної пам'яті, функція інновації та креативності та компенсаторна функція. У таких творах

відбувається свідомо редуція, що є наслідком спрощення текстів. Незважаючи на те, що «нова індійська міфотворчість» пропонує матеріал для рефлексії та аналізу, вона дає псевдо-духовне розуміння філософських аспектів індуїзму, так як підносить стародавні цінності масовому споживачеві, виходячи з потреб нашого часу.

Ключові слова: культура, культурна пам'ять, інтерпретація, міфологія, віра, мораль, добро, зло, пізнання, буття, філософський поворот, особистість, цінності, суспільство, духовність.

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