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BRIDGING CINEMATIC NARRATIVES AND LITERARY DEPTHS: FUSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGICAL NOVELS CONCERNING AMISH TRIPATHI'S *RAM CHANDRA SERIES*

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**BRIDGING CINEMATIC NARRATIVES AND LITERARY DEPTHS:
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_____ Garima Singh

Abstract

Religious texts in the Indian context are perhaps the most utilised and most admired for every generation and genre. Irrespective of belonging to the contemporary age or being placed in the erstwhile era, Indian mythology and its umpteen tributaries have significantly influenced Indian Literature. The recent trends in the last decade have focused on exploring mythical tales in the light of modern literary texts and creating connections between archaeological evidence and mythical stories. The narratives in such works have been constructed as such to enamour a wider audience to take them through an emotionally resonant journey. The vivid descriptions construct a visual experience that mirrors the cinematic composition. Amish Tripathi does this experiment in the *Ram Chandra Series* and weaves a visual spectacle in a cinematic tapestry. This paper examines the gripping cinematic structure of the *Ram Chandra Series* by Amish Tripathi and explores the building of gradually diversified and multi-dimensional narratives in contemporary mythical novels. Along with that, it also attempts to analyze the book series from a modern and newly cultured perspective, creating a grand landscape and visual imagery through immersive experiences that construct a live-action substitute through contemporary literary texts.

Keywords: Amish Tripathi, Ram Chandra series, visual, mythology, narrative structure, cinematic view, Popular culture.

Introduction

When globalisation expanded worldwide, it established a new order where consumers globally had high demands from distributors and actively sought more comfortable commodities to secure their financial stability. This rapid advancement led to widespread mass consumption, significantly impacting both superpowers and third-world countries. Eventually, this dynamic contributed to identity issues in the postmodern era. The postmodern phase in India was not succumbed to the socio-cultural and political changes but also to literature. The Indian literary heritage has shown profound interest and fascination for Indian mythology since the ages. To Indian writers from diverse ideologies and cultures, the growing readership concerning ancient Indian tales has offered a broader scope to experiment with newer genres.

In the present era of globalisation, the resurgence of mythology has been used as a significant tool for debates about contemporary issues. The definition of myth in contemporary times has become vague, loose, and broad as myths operate universally and diversely. They are a set of tales believed to have happened and have universal significance that complies with specific codes, rules, rituals, social behaviour, morality, and faith in a particular community or culture. Roland Barthes believes that myth, as a type of speech, is communication, and everything can be myth conveyed by a discourse in which myth utters its message. Everything can be a myth. Per this definition, the ancient religious texts in the Indian literary corpus can be excluded from consideration as epics like Ramayana and Mahabharat are not merely a product of linguistic phenomena but are deeply embedded in India's cultural, religious, social, and philosophical fabric.

Oral traditions are the basis of transmitting Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other mythological or religious stories. The oral transmission of these mythical stories has hardly been original now as they are continuously interpreted and reinterpreted, codified, and modified to

become acceptable and to keep themselves alive throughout centuries. In Indian regional literature around the late 20th century, writers used mythological references to reclaim the nation's development as a cultural and political entity that had just emerged from the colonial past and was stepping into the globalised world. The narratives were highly influenced by the newly developed nation's debates concerning its past. Aparna Dharwadker, in her essay *Myth, Ambivalence, and Evil*, mentions that the primary focus was "not to assert the existence of the nation in the past but to determine what to appeal to historical and cultural antecedents means in the present" (Dharwadker, 2005).

The inter-relation of ancient Indian tales with contemporary times also influenced the global audience by instilling an alienation effect in dealing with the cultural identity crisis. The confluence of cinema and novels has given an engrossing direction for the writers as well as for the readers. It has not only emerged as an engaging narrative but a genre that binds the sociocultural fabric of Indian panorama and captures the multifaceted enigma of the ancient religious texts. The popular texts of the current century reflect the psyche of the reader, whose purchasing choices directly influence the economic landscape. The emergence of the English-speaking cosmopolitan population in the urban regions of India began to take an interest in popular Western novels containing mystery, miracles, and fantasy. According to Andre Lefevere, a Belgian translation theorist and scholar, the contemporary mythological novel can be termed 'refractions' He defines this term as "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, to influence the way in which the audience reads the work" (Lefevere, 1982).

A narrative transforms into a newly represented text, filtered and refracted by a prism called translators or refractors. The original text is modified to suit the receptor culture and its ideology,

as Lefevere states that the ideology of culture and society plays a significant role in refraction. In recent times, Amish Tripathi has achieved unparalleled fame in the mythological genre by publishing his first novel of the series, *The Shiva Trilogy*. Amish has been recognised as one of the most influential Indian English writers in this genre who took a problematic approach to portraying mythical tales, relating them to the socio-cultural aspects of contemporary times. After the enormous success and global recognition of his first series, Amish Tripathi developed the next mythological series based on the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. The original *Ramayana* was written by Maharishi Valmiki. It is believed that he recited it to his disciples Lav and Kush, the twin sons of Lord Ram and Goddess Sita, as the notion of writing was not a possible means in those days.

Other versions like *Vaidehi Ramayana* by Pandit Ayodhya Singh, *Kamb Ramayana* by Tamil poet Kamban, *Bhatt Ramayana* by Shri Diwakar Prakash Bhatt in Kashmiri language, and *Geet Ramayana* by an author from Trinidad, are some of the famous regional reinterpretations of the original text. The flexibility of the story is what gives writers of all ages the liberty to experiment with the radiance of the epic. Every new version only goes to reinforce the essence of the original. Ananda Guruge, in his book *The Society of Ramayana*, states, "The legendary portion of the Balakanda and the whole of the Uttarakanda were added probably under Brahmanical influence and a new list of contents along with a mythical account of the origin of the epic through divine inspiration experienced by Valmiki was included" (Guruge,1991).

In the current century, where cultural exchanges and technological advancement have become interrelated and influence the core of human conditions all over the world, Amish Tripathi's attempt to rewrite the story of *Ramayana* is akin to celebrating the richness of Indian tradition but also creating a deeper understanding of universal themes and human experiences,

while rendering a faithful image of the original. Unlike the basic idea of retelling an ancient epic through the lens of the contemporary landscape, Tripathi uses a non-conventional structure for the *Ram Chandra Series*, introducing a unique narrative pattern in the Indian literary panorama that he calls multilinear narrative, in which a connection brings many characters together by using hyperlinks in a text. The series is a collection of four books: *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku* (2015), *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017), *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* (2019), and *War of Lanka* (2022). The series is not entirely based on the original text, but certainly a modification of the plot and the characters where it moulds the present-day challenges and socio-cultural context in contemporary times, producing newer messages.

Amish uses filmic elements to shape the narrative structure of the series. All four novels begin with the abduction of Sita from the perspective of the protagonists of each story, while the first three novels are about the early lives of the characters. They all begin with and later merge at the segment of Sita's abduction. The novel's narrative structure is designed as an 'intermedial storytelling,' a term used by Irina O. Rajewsky, a German scholar. It refers to the unique storytelling techniques, including filmic ones, which emphasise alternative media within the literature, primarily established by the literary medium itself, to achieve specific narrative purposes. The narration is filled with mystery elements and ends every section with constant suspense, making the reader jump to conclusions for the next part.

The engaging construction of the series mainly focuses on exhibiting a visual experience to the reader through alluring images. He carefully designs each scene, arranges them in a filmic expression, and targets the reader's cognitive schemata with specific gestural actions. One of the key features in Amish Tripathi's novels is the modern promotional strategies he applies for his

book launches, including releasing cinematic trailers of his novels. The trailers depict the visual and dynamic elements that create anticipation and excitement for his readers. The lavish use of technical effects in the trailers captures the essence of the epic narrative of his series, which is widely shared on social media platforms and maintains the mystery and intrigue.

Amish not only crafts vivid images to offer immersive experiences for readers but also expresses the characters' thoughts through subtle bodily movements and gestures, effectively conveying the emotions of the scenes. The Hindi terms he incorporates in his novels impart a warm and respectful tone to Indian English writings, such as calling their elder brother “Dada”, addressing “guruji”, greetings with “Namaste”, or using Sanskrit chants to honour their motherland. In the initial book of the series, *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*, he portrays the Battle of Karachappa, highlighting the intense diplomatic encounter between Dashrath and Kubaer. Suddenly, the reader pans to the silently seated Raavan. It is through Dashrath that the reader averts their gaze to the uncanny pendant hanging around Raavan's neck, which are two phalanges of a human being. A sinister yet horrific scene is thus introduced at the very beginning of the series.

The nobility and the magnanimity of Ram's character, as well as his conjugal devotion towards his principles, have, for many centuries, exercised a far-reaching moral effect as paragons for imitation among the Indians. Amish Tripathi maintains this benign character of Ram in his version as well as the symbolic essence of the original one. He ensures that the readers constantly compare and match the filmic modes in the novel to the cognitive schemata of a film and then actualise the latter. Each section of every chapter ends with an unfinished thought of the speaker and builds a thrilling assumption for further events. Introducing new characters draws quick anticipation from the reader as they are already familiar with them through some source. The

narrative structure in Amish's novels is arranged so that it exhibits the camera work of the text, panning to every tiny detail of the character and its surroundings.

One such instance is when Amish shifts the attention from the longstanding conflict of the Gurus to the architectural description of Mithila, whose erotic and flamboyant construction weaves a visual scenery when Ram and Lakshman enter the city whose prime minister is Sita, the princess of Mithila. The Sita in Tripathi's creation is too disparate from her stereotypical image. She is brave, a skilled warrior, and a fierce woman, and she runs her kingdom as the prime minister, a relatively uncommon notion for that period. Amish moves his lens to every character and focuses on facial movements to express the characters' mental state. Apart from that, he also utilises fonts to amplify the tone of the texts; for instance, the capitalisation of the sentence denoting the loudness of the dialogue; the sentences in italics display the character's inner thoughts, and the repetition of a particular sentence or scene highlights the significance of the segment in all the books.

The repetition of a few scenes in the first three books, for instance, the swayamvar scenes, where all three protagonists are present together, and the narrator says, "If looks could kill, Raavan would have certainly felled a few today" (Tripathi, 2015), creates a sensational effect to enhance the intensity of the segment in the first three books. The loop-like structure of the novel demonstrates a filmic framework that modifies the literariness of the book, which suggests the concept of 'contamination', a term used by Irina. O. Rajewsky, according to which there is no 'conventional' narration anymore; literary narration is elementarily shaped by the application of filmic ways of expression and prescriptive and restrictive rules of filmic narration are applied at all times in a literary text. Amish composes the narration not only through a closed sequence of

events but also by interconnecting the character's constellation so that each character's story seamlessly links with others, propelling the saga forward.

The discovery of Vishnu is another major highlight of the series as the true hero of Mother India. Amish emphasises the significance of gender neutrality in society through the female roles in his book. Sita and Sunaina are portrayed as independent and self-reliant women, capable enough to face any challenge and to stand for righteousness. The predefined idea of Vishnu as the male God is negated in the series by labelling Sita as the 'Vishnu', targeting the pre-conceived notion of a "hero" or "heroine" by merging the current socio-cultural context of gender roles with Indian mythical tales.

The sudden revelations, brief anecdotes, and unexpected surprises are crucial elements in Tripathi's narratives that captivate the readers, compelling them to uncover the mysteries in the subsequent parts of his series. Organising every section and linking it in a pantomimic structure make his stories more filmic. The medium of his novels is not just words but also the arrangement of the plots and the character development, which gives his readers an authentic experience. He delves deep into the complexities of human nature and unravels the grey shades of the character. In the first two books, Raavan is depicted solely as a terrifying Lankan king who believes in extorting the properties of the Sapt Sindhu, the cause of Ram's tremendous trials, and a ruthless monster who abducted the Vishnu. However, Amish exemplifies a distinct version of Raavan, diverting it from the stereotypical idea of the character.

Each character is driven by a compelling, empathetic force that propels their journey forward. Amish crafts a narrative that heightens anticipation for the next instalment, concluding each novel with a note that continues the unfolding riddle into the next book. The surprising easter

eggs, the uncovering of hidden motives and the conjecture about the changing dynamics between the characters are the unique selling proposition of his books, making them visually appealing. Amish also includes some sequences that resonate with the actual story of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The duel between Vali and Ram in Kishkindha, the fiery destruction of the crops surrounding the central city Sigiriya in Lanka by Hanuman, and Vibhishan negotiating with Ram and Bharat to aid in defeating Raavan in the main war are some episodes that are remodified to render the essence of the original epic.

The details of the strategies provide the reader with firsthand knowledge of war and reveal the horror of death that people try to deny in their daily lives with impunity. Amish attempts to design a one-long-shot sequence of a war that depicts the simultaneous devastation of lives on both sides of the army as the attack commences. At the end of every book, Amish concludes it with "...to be continued", which builds possible assumptions for the latter books. The conclusion of the fourth book, *War of Lanka*, returns to the first book of *The Shiva Trilogy*, which is based on the ideal city of Meluha created by the seventh Vishnu, Lord Ram. The prequel pattern of the series erects an intricate chain tying with *The Immortals of Meluha*. The character arcs in his novels exhibit the philosophical reflection of contemporary times and fuse it with the ancient texts of Indian literature. This amalgamation of cinematic elements and literary text has emerged as an influential source for creating new concepts in literature, broadening their reach from screen to pages and vice versa. The *Ram Chandra Series* is one such model that not only brings forth the transformation of text into a live-action cinematic experience but also builds a bridge between the age-old composed religious tales and the rapidly altering Indian culture.

Literature Review

Scholars from various fields have opined on the workings of the novel art in Indian literature, delving deep into the cultural context of the reinterpretations of the mythological texts. Discussions about female roles and their perspectives, diplomatic agencies of that period, the modern aesthetics relevant in the tales and the concept of distinct ideological conflicts have been intriguing subjects for researchers. In the past few decades, the reinterpretation of religious tales has been significantly utilised to highlight the socio-cultural concerns of Indian society. Amish uses his writings in a non-conventional manner to do the same. Since his first series, he has drawn a distinct world of fantasy where he brings the archaeological evidence to connect the ancient religious tales with the Indus valley civilisation. His novels are famous for the lavish exhibitions of the tales and the uncommon descriptions of the character arcs. Preeti Padsumbiya has examined the possible relationship between ancient Indian tales and historical facts. D. J and M. Pillai have explored the role of women in Amish novels, which are severely distinct from their stereotypical images and reinterpreted the age-old descriptions. Studies have been done on how the modernisation of myth has reached the new generation of readers. E. Dawson Varughese has discussed the effect of the book covers representing the deities. Ananda Guruge has extensively explained the original text and how it has been remodified over centuries. Despite the detailed scholarship, there is a lack of study on the narrative structure of Tripathi's works, composed of cinematic elements intersecting with literary forms, creating a bridge between ancient tales and modern literature.

Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative and interpretive approach to analyse Amish Tripathi's book series, *Ram Chandra Series*, to demonstrate the intersection of cinematic techniques and literary

narrative structure, along with a brief description of the original text on which the novels are based. It employs a thematic analysis to examine how mythological elements are used in contemporary Indian novels. The analysis is also based on the closed readings of the four books in the *Ram Chandra Series*, focusing on the narrative structure, the use of cinematic elements and Tripathi's version of Ramayana, emphasising modern cultural context. The study is grounded in the concept of intermedial storytelling as described by Irina O. Rajewsky, which refers to integrating filmic techniques within literary texts and references Andre Lefevere's theory of refraction, discussing the text adaptation to meet the needs of different audiences. It also examines how these techniques contribute to a "filmic" reading experience, where readers visualise the narrative as if watching a movie. Apart from the primary text, the paper also touches upon the secondary sources of mythological retellings and cinematic techniques that support the analysis.

Results and Discussion

This particular paper examines the aesthetic veracity of a novel having cinematic elements. The primary text and the analysis of the secondary sources helped explore the visual impact of narrative structure. It also explores how this novice experiment evolved as a popular literary genre in a postmodern world and how it influenced historical and religious accounts by tracing ancient texts and revisiting them to relate them to the contemporary context. The study also explicates the broadened application of filmic components in a novel to build a bridge between cinematic experience and literary text. Remodification or retellings of ancient Indian tales have expanded the realm of Indian literary montage by producing technological forms of words and articulating the camera work of a text. It also highlighted how mythology can become a source of information on social and cultural issues and how it can develop a new concept of 'heroism' by removing the

preconceived idea of a hero or a heroine. Its major finding highlights the blending of two distinct areas of art into a new form.

Conclusion

Ram Chandra Series demonstrates a fascinating fusion of cinematic narrative and literature. Through the paper, the analyses of specific filmic modes applied in literature and the gripping narrative structure demonstrate the transformation of a theatrical experience for the reader with vibrant imagery and filmic techniques. The flamboyant and excessive movements from one scene to another create a panoramic sequence and constantly build suspense through the closed sequence of events. This paper will help us understand the significance of technological advancement in literature and how it goes into a transition to experiment further. The sociocultural changes in the second half of the 20th century aggravated globalisation and impacted all art forms. This paper highlights the evolution of the newly emerging mass culture, which also helps expand the economic factor and retrace the ancient Indian stories in a new form. It focuses on the specific ways of filmic production that lie in the non-conventional writing styles in modern novels, raising further questions regarding the different materials of cinemas and their possible incorporation into literature, i.e. sound and colours, that could become another source or bridge between these two distinct art forms.

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