



Devdutt Pattanaik's exploration and Indian retelling on myth

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Abstract

The paper presents different sorts of retelling and interpretation of myth and mythology given by well-known Indian mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik. He is well-versed in Indian mythologies giving insights about variations in the perception and analysis of Indian mythological stories and Indian culture. He gives logical understanding of every aspect of Indian culture, Gods and Goddesses. His understanding of the subject remains at various dimensions. 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.

Keywords: Devdutt Pattanaik, myth, mythology, Indian culture, tradition, stories, dharma, mythological women characters, religion, gods and goddesses

Introduction

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. Even before the arrival of writing skills, myths existed in society through oral tradition. It shaped the foundation of civilization religious, culture, philosophies, literature, art, tradition and custom. Myths of a civilization stories which frames and give structure to the culture of that particular civilization. Hence, studying myths, scriptures, epics and sacred book of a particular religion will give a deep insight into its belief system and social structure.

Objectives of the Paper

- To explore different retellings in mythology
- To understand the different perspectives of the reader and the author about the retellings
- To explore the content regarding the various retellings and understand their importance in the present age

Hindu mythology – Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. He retells many stories associated with these Gods and attempts to find out the 'truth' behind the myths linked the social structure of a society. One can find the bifurcation of the truth about Nature and Culture, Life and Death, Dharma and Adharma in the book.

Everybody lives in myth. This idea disturbs most people. For, conventionally, myth means falsehood. Nobody likes to live in falsehood. Everybody believes they live in truth. But there are many types of truth. Some objective, some subjective. Some logical, some intuitive. Some cultural, some universal. Some are based on evidence; others depend on faith. Myth is truth that is subjective, intuitive, cultural, and grounded in faith.

In the very beginning of the book Devdutt clarifies that the truth he is talking about is not the superior or even inferior to any other truth. These interpretations are a different understanding of human life. "Ancient Hindu seers knew myth as *mithya*. They distinguished it from *sat*. *Mithya* was truth seen through a frame of reference. *Sat* was truth independent of any frame of reference".

According to him there is nothing like falsehood. There is only complete truth (*Purna Satya*) and incomplete truth (*Mithya*) unlike contemporary understanding of myth as false, he argues and explains myth as subjective truth. It is first a perception given ages ago. With thought comes a perception and with perception one creates a story. That story is complete truth for one but can be incomplete truth for another based on his perception. But none of the perception is incorrect as every perception is built on subjective experience.

Further in the same book he explains fundamental things of Hindu scriptures such as for Hindus there are three worlds i.e. *Swarga* (Heaven), *Bhuloka* (Earth), and *Patala* (Hell). And it is not stiff that Gods reside in *Swarga*, Lord Vishnu for instance resides beyond the three worlds. Through *Yayati's* story Devdutt brings out Indian mind where supporting the older generation and not thinking about gives own happiness is considered very virtuous.

In this book Devdutt searches for the answers related to nature and culture, life and death, perfection and possibility and many such. He retells Indian myths and other Hindu stories in order to logically understand Indian culture, rituals and symbols. "If myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea. Mythology constitute of stories, symbols and rituals that make a myth tangible. Stories, symbols and rituals are essentially languages. Languages that are heard, seen and performed. Together they construct the truths of the culture".

He adds to the understanding of the text by giving relevant, diagrams, illustration and commentary. He unravels ancient Hindus myths which frame the Hindu culture and customs. Such as he explains *Jaya* and *Sita* by the same noted author gives a new understanding of the mythological women

characters such as Sita, Draupadi, Mandodari, Kunti, Gandhari, Surpankha, Satyawati, Urmila, Kaikeyi and many more. He reflects different traits of male and female personality.

In his book *Sita* he understands Sita a woman of wisdom: "Sita's father never knew the world that was the kitchen. Sita's mother never knew the world that was the court. But Sita realized she knew both. This is how the mind expands, she thought to herself. This is how Brahma becomes the brahman. She was a brahmin, she realized, seeker of wisdom as well as transmitter of wisdom".

Devdutt might sound preachy at many points but the sensitive topics that he is dealing with makes him sound like an omniscient writer. The book answers many whys and hows related with mythological characters, which were unanswered till now. There are many reflections of mythological characters in human personality even today such as one will find individual restricted by his own ethical principles like Ram, there are many independent women today who possess their own thoughts and follow their instinct. The character of Ram can be seen as very complicated to be true in reality because of his decisions that he makes during dilemmatic situations.

Another book by Devdutt which explores on evolution of Indian culture is '*Culture: 50 insights from Mythology*'. It connects mythology with culture and their influences on one another. He compares the cultural beliefs of Western mythology with Indian mythology:

The Western story celebrates a linear construct of life – with one beginning, one ending and one life in between. The Indian story celebrates a cyclical construct of life with many beginnings, many endings and many lives in between. Thus, stories reflect the culture they emerge from, while reinforcing the culture at the same time.

Stories and myths of a culture influences perceptions and build truths for a society. A culture is constructed by various mythological stories, which gives relevant answers to many cultural practices, traditions, customs, rituals that we follow. It enlightens its readers with relative truth, which is sometimes taken as an absolute truth by its followers. Culture represents the belief system which is built on the mythologies which consist of myths which keeps on changing with the perception of society in which one lives.

A story is basically a plot but narration is the process by which a story is told. The same story sounds different when the storyteller is different. And every storyteller changes his narration depending on the audience. All this makes storytelling rather complex, which is why our view of the world and our truths are also complex.

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