Exploring Myth and Fantasy in the Novels of Amish Tripathi: A Critical Review

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Abstract: Amish Tripathi's novels, particularly 'The Shiva Trilogy' and 'Ram Chandra Series,' have captivated readers through their innovative blend of myth and fantasy, reinterpreting ancient Indian epics in contemporary narrative forms. This critical review explores how Tripathi reconstructs mythological narratives, transforming traditional characters and events into accessible and relatable stories for modern audiences. The study examines recurring themes such as heroism, morality, destiny, and the humanization of divine figures, highlighting the ways in which fantasy elements are intricately woven into the mythic framework. By analyzing narrative techniques, character development, and world-building, this review sheds light on Tripathi's ability to balance historical imagination with creative liberty. Furthermore, it discusses the cultural significance of his works in popularizing Indian mythology, making it relevant for both scholarly inquiry and mass readership. Through a synthesis of literary criticism, reader reception, and thematic analysis, the paper emphasizes the role of myth and fantasy as tools for storytelling, moral exploration, and cultural transmission. Ultimately, this review underscores Amish Tripathi's contribution to contemporary Indian literature, illustrating how his novels serve as a bridge between ancient mythological traditions and modern literary sensibilities, enriching the understanding of myth in the 21st century.

Keywords: Myth and Fantasy, Novels, Amish Tripathi, Contemporary

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the earliest forms of storytelling, encompassing the modern global literary sphere, still consists of myth and fantasy. Cultures worldwide have outgrown the classical sense of storytelling where myths were only old tales about gods and heroes. Myths have added, and still add, practical value to ethical, spiritual, and philosophical cultural storytelling. Myths and stories provide the archetypes, symbols, and structures. Humanity still draws meaning about life by cultivating myths and stories (Arathi, A. M. 2022). Fantasy is simply the genre which creative borrowing of myth material can be transformed into new stories that go beyond ordinary life. Together, they can still innovate, collaborate, and provide a seamless bridge of imagination to modern living. Among the world's contemporary literary society, particularly postcolonial settings like India, the retelling of cultural narratives, cultural re-identity, and modern reality has been most strongly aided by the use of myth and fantasy. A strong relational foundation exists where myth becomes the resting point and starting point with fantasy. In The

Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell argued that myths expose the underlying universal structures of human experience and illustrated this using the hero's journey archetype. Fantasy fiction seems to be much more popular than it used to be. It has Tolkien and more modern retelling of epic stories for inspiration and popularity. Fantasy seems to make the stories focused more on the present than the more nostalgic religious aspect. I do think it has its own magic, and it is a large aspect of The Modern Indian Myth is Amish Tripathi. It is one of the more interesting example of the modern Indian myth and magic is the intersection of myth and modern fantasy writing. It becomes more interesting as magic is a large part of such writing (Arunraj, S., & Viduthalai, P. 2018).

Myths are integral to every culture and society within India. While in some Western civilizations myths are considered a thing of the past, in India, they are still part of the living and the breathing—integrated into our everyday discourse, woven into the fabric of our rituals and folklore, and recreated and celebrated in our festivals. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are religious texts; they are also the bedrock of narratives that form our moral and cultural compass. With the Indian English literature movement, these myths found a new audience. Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, followed by Githa Hariharan and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, dealt with myths in ways that reframed the discourse around identity, gender, and issues of modernity in the postcolonial era. This shift in perspective spurred the growing, commercially successful genre of mythological fiction, with Ashok Banker and Devdutt Pattanaik modernizing and reinterpreting the classics. Within this genre, Tripathi Amish is one of the most popular authors, often termed the 'literary pop star' of Indian mythological fiction. Unlike most other authors, Tripathi attempts to reclaim the 'myth' from 'mythological' fiction by humanizing the characters and treating them as leaders of society, bringing them down from their pedestal (Prasad, B. 2018). Take for example The Shiva Trilogy published from 2010 to 2013 where the god Shiva is viewed not as a god but as a tribal head who attains legendary worth through a descending hierarchy of his actions, principles, and philosophical choices. This revisionist perspective conflates myth and history, situating the mythical within the lived experience. Likewise, the Ram Chandra Series where Ram, Sita and Raavan are complexly characterized and humanized through the prism of political strife and power. While incorporating elements of fantasy like the Somras and other magical substances as well as the hidden Nagas and the Vayuputras, Amish builds a mytho- fantastical world that is still rooted in Indic traditions and resonates with contemporary times.

Amish's novels are not only popular for their content but also for their unique style of writing. He writes fast, is easy to read, and is cinematic, mirroring the style of some popular thriller writers. This made him writing of ancient myths digestible for the younger audience, especially the younger urban Indian readers who face these myths through English retellings of the books, instead of Sanskrit or regional languages (Prasad, B. 2019). By using mythology, philosophy and popular fiction, he is able to connect the sacred and the secular, the modern and the traditional. He brings a living fantasy to the present, helping to transform and rebuild interest in the mythic past of India. Another essential element of Amish's myth-fantasy fusion is its cultural and philosophical significance. His novels promote the Indic world view, focusing on the themes of dharma, karma and free will, while also addressing governance, moral relativism, and the role of women which are current day issues. Sita in Sita: Warrior of Mithila (2017) is a notable example of this where he reimagines Sita, not as a passive consort, but as a fierce warrior and leader, embodying cultural continuity and feminist ideals. In Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta (2019), Raavan is also presented as a brilliant character, a multifaceted musician, and a visionary, which makes it much more complicated. Instead of a villain, he is complicated as a brilliant and multifaceted character. Such revisioning shows how contemporary values can make dialogue with and reshape modern myths within the fantasy genre.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MYTH IN WORLD LITERATURE

Understanding the world's literature involves engaging with myths since myths are the first forms of storytelling. Myths consisted of portable narratives within tribal communities long before the writing system was invented. They explained the universe, natural phenomena, the origins of humanity, and moral codes. They constituted literary narratives and and collective wisdom and cultural identity. As a people of culture began writing literature, Mesopotamia, Greece, India, China, and Egypt incorporated and expanded upon the literature of the ancient civilization. Impacts of these cultures continue to shape the elements of modern world literature today. Myths served and laid the foundation of the world's literature. Myths and literature are interrelated within ancient Mesopotamia (Bala, S. 2024). The Mesopotamians left literature prominently. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a Sumerian text. It is the world's oldest epic demonstrating the impact of Mesopotamian myths. It blends passion, heroism, and the quest for immortality. It is a divine and heroic quest epic with a gripping storyline. The text

reflects the worries of ancient city dwellers like death, companionship, and the bond between people and the divine. Likewise, the Babylonian Enuma Elish describes how the world was made through a divine conflict, shedding light on the cosmological and political structures of ancient Mesopotamian civilization. These examples show us how, along with the primary system of the text, the safe and liturgical metaphysics and poetry also combined with myths.

Greek mythology has arguably had the greatest and most lasting impact on world literature and Western literary traditions. The Homeric epic, The Iliad and The Odyssey, included characters from the Greek pantheon including Zeus and Athena, and Achilles, and celebrated the values of heroism, honor, and fate. The performances were a source of entertainment, and they sustained ideal and enforced social values and norm within the society of ancient Greece. The later dramatists – Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides – also used the myth to compose tragedies that explored the themes of human suffering, divine justice, and the conflicts between the individual and the society (Bala, S.). Oedipus and Antigone and Medea were, and still are, powerful myths that encapsulated the most profound and complex moral and psychological problems and influenced Western literature and philosophy. Other Greek philosophers, such as Plato, used Greek myths in dialogues, most famously The Myth of the Cave, to elaborate complex ideas of truth, knowledge, and reality. It is these myths that people and philosophers used as a creative and imaginative source to build the main pillars of their literature and rational thought. Unlike Greek literature that built upon mythology, Roman literature transformed it and used it to serve political ends and as a tool to reshape culture. Virgil's Aeneid was the first to reinterpret the myth of Aeneas to give Rome a heroic origin story to justify its imperial destiny. Ovid's Metamorphoses sought to gather and articulate disparate mythological tales of the Greeks and Romans into one story all about change, innovation, and the various shifts of a single identity (Ashri, S.). Ovid, more than any other writer, created a mythic legacy that heavily inspired other European writers, most notably Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton, which shows how versatile myths were and how they could change to fit new genres of literature. From Roman literature, myths emerged as a new vehicle for the preservation of cultural memory, while simultaneously signaling ideological progress aligned with power, conquest, and civilization.

3. INDIAN MYTHOLOGICAL TRADITION

Indian mythology is different from other mythologies worldwide. Most other mythologies are relics of the past, but Indian mythology is a vibrant living tradition. It creates and influences rituals, holidays, and customs. It is one of the largest and richest narrative traditions in world literature. It is made up of oral and folk traditions, texts, and literature, including the epics, philosophy, and Puranas. To trace the literary roots of mythology in Indian culture, one must first try to understand its adaptability, diversity, and philosophical depth. Constraints of time and space make Indian mythology one of the most valuable literary sources used to construct other literature (Bala, S., & Dwivedi, R. R. 2022). A good starting point in tracing the origins of Indian mythology is the Vedas. These are the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, written between 1500 and 500 BCE. The Vedas are, for the most part, liturgical texts and contain divine and mythological stories, hymns, and allegories, which lay the root for the traditions of mythology. The Rigveda, for instance, tells of the Purusha Sukta, which describes the cosmic sacrifice of the primordial being Purusha. These myths not only explained the beginnings of the universe but also justified the social hierarchy, intertwining cosmology and social order. Indra's myth of slaying the drought serpent Vritra was symbolic of the triumph of order over chaos, becoming a staple in later literature and folklore. Even in these early myths, the characteristic Indian inclination to combine metaphysical thoughts with a story was already evident.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the greatest mythological works of India and are considered literary treasures of the world as well. The Ramayana was written by Valmiki and tells the story of Prince Rama, his time in exile, the demon king Ravana capturing his wife Sita, and the ultimate victory of dharma over adharma. It is an exciting tale of adventure, but the Ramayana also deals with fundamental issues of duty, loyalty, and sacrifice, making it an ethical and cultural guide for the ages. The Mahabharata is regarded as the longest epic in literature and an encyclopedia of history, philosophy, myth, and theology. It revolves around the Kurukshetra war of the Pandavas and Kauravas and is filled with countless stories, legends, and philosophical ideas, key among them the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna and Arjuna converse about duty, free will, and liberation. Each of the epics has preserved and evolved with the times, from various languages and performing arts to present-day media, vibrant and dynamic Indian myth. Along with the epics, the Puranas became another important part of the

Indian literature tradition (Balaji, A. 2016). Puranic literature comprises a huge body of work focusing on mythological stories, genealogies of gods and kings, cosmological accounts, and religious rituals. The Puranas, to this day, serve as encyclopedias of myth and theology for priests and laypeople. The mythological encyclopedias include the Vishnu Purana, Shiva Purana, and Devi Bhagavata Purana, among others, and are referred to as the eighteen Mahapuranas. The Puranic literature primarily describes the exploits of Vishnu, Shiva, and the Goddess (Devi). Each was said to have cosmic roles and manifestations (avatars) and each had multiple relationships with the mortal world. For instance, Vishnu is said to have ten avatars (Matsya the fish to Kalki the messiah) which demonstrate the Indian belief system of a crisis-response God to be present in every era. The Puranas also demonstrate the adaptability of myth to local cultures, incorporating folk traditions, regional legends, and historical figures into pan-Indian religious frameworks (Bandopadhyay, A. 2020).

4. FANTASY AS A LITERARY GENRE

Fantasy is one of the oldest and most creative forms of storytelling. While realist literature attempts to show the world as it is, fantasy literature deals with other worlds and alternative experiences and realities that include magic and the supernatural. Given the highly imaginative aspects of literature, fantasy is able to assist in the creative exploration of existential questions, moral issues, and philosophical ideas that lie outside the ambit of ordinary reality. By focusing on archetypes and symbolic motifs, the genre of fantasy blends the imaginary with the real. In doing so it provides recreation and insight. Over the years, the genre has been influenced by folklore and epics as well as religious myths, all the while responding to the tastes and cultural context of the audience. The oral traditions of storytelling is perhaps the earliest form of fantasy literature. Instead of writing, ancient civilizations used myths, legends, and folktales to explain the world, set social order, and communicate moral lessons. Edifying narratives featuring gods and heroes and other fantastical elements were also performed. Early myths can be seen as very childhood fantasies. Unlike modern fantasies though, they were not entirely fictional. Greek mythology, for instance, consisted of Zeus and Hercules along with the Titans, as well as the Norse mythology with Odin and Thor which all contained heroics, sorcery, and extraordinary worlds (Batra, J. 2018). These worlds were the constitutive wonders of contemporary fantasies. Indian Puranic stories and epics with their gods, and demons,

featuring magical weapons and enchanting stories were the foundational structures which contemporary Indian fantasy writers are built upon.

Fantasy within the Western literary tradition originated alongside the epic and romantic literature. The medieval romances within the European tradition, where knights fought dragons and where enchanted lands were explored, represent some of the first literary fantasies. Historical imagination in pieces like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Arthurian legends fused with magical elements, creating imaginative and human worlds. These stories often centered on the universal themes of human honor, heroism, and the struggle against the relentless forces of nature and the human condition, which established fantasy as a serious literary form capable of engaging with the human condition on a deep philosophical level. Moreover, fantasy also served as a medium to explore moral and spiritual issues, as expressed in the allegories of Dante's Divine Comedy and Milton's Paradise Lost, where imagination was used to express visions of hell and heaven. The first writers to ensure that fantasy was recognized as a literary genre were author's of the 20th century, particularly J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Tolkien's The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings are examples of high fantasy where complex worlds and mythic narratives are constructed around the use of archetypal characters (Batra, J. 2023). While building out his huge secondary world, Tolkien integrated and built on elements of Norse, Anglo-Saxon, and Celtic mythologies. Lewis built on Christian allegory in a fantastical setting in The Chronicles of Narnia and pointed out the moral worth that fantasy could possess. Tolkien and Lewis established the foundational principles of modern fantasy which include the building of a secondary world, the addition of magical or supernatural elements, and the hero's journey. The landscape of fantasy and fantastical literature, including modern Indian writers, has been shaped by these principles.

5 MYTH AND FANTASY IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Integrating myth and fantasy into Indian English literature brings together elements of cultural remembrance and creativity along with modern storytelling. Indian English literature began with colonial and matured with postcolonial times. Indian English literature has always incorporated the value Indian mythology cherished. Indian writers have almost always drawn from these rich cultural traditions - from the great Indian epics, the Puranas, and Indian folklore, and oral traditions - and modernized them to reflect current social issues, philosophical thoughts, modern realities and ethics (Bhadauria, M. 2020). Blending myth with

fantasy has uniquely told Indian English stories, and these Indian English stories have also told global issues. One of the first writers of Indian English to deal with myth was R. K. Narayan. Narayan, in his The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic (1972) first modernized the great classical Sanskrit epics before them and made it accessible for contemporary readers preserving the ethics and the cultural values of the text. Although Narayan's prose was mostly realistic, he also wove modern Indian social values in a myth and told strong narratives. Myth, in his adaptation, becomes a literary device that bridges the gap between ancient texts and contemporary readers, setting a standard for later authors attempting to merge myth with creative fiction and fantasy.

After the end of colonialism, Indian English literature began to embrace a number of new writers and new perspectives, in particular the integration of myth and fantasy into literature. Identity, memory, and history became the central themes of mythic and fantastical literature by Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, and Amitav Ghosh. Rushdie presents a fantastical and mythical world in which the protagonist of Midnight's Children has magical powers. These powers in fact relate to the powers of magical nation-building and history of post-colonial India. Vikram Chandra, in Red Earth and Pouring Rain, employs Indian myths and history and several folktales to a mythology detective narrative. These post-colonial Indian writers do not use myth and fantasy in a free imaginative sense, but use these elements in addressing the socio-political issues of post-colonial India. The imagination of socio-political issues in post-colonial India, culture and ethics has constructed continuity. The use of myth in Indian English literature has the unique feature of revision and reinterpretation of characters, themes and narratives of contemporary ideas and values. The trend of feminist representations and retellings in particular has the revision of mythological characters with agency, governance and psychological depth (Bisht, S. 2022). In The Palace of Illusions (2008), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni retells the story of the Mahabharata, transforming the narrative to center around Draupadi, a central character in the primary story, but who has been silenced in the classical narrative. Divakaruni uses fantasy storytelling in order to portray the human side of myth, examine gender power relations, and ethical and moral questions, showcasing how myths can adapt in order to suit different points of view. In the same manner, Devdutt Pattanaik uses mythology, philosophy, and creative reconstruction in works like Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata (2010) and Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana (2013) to modernize these stories alongside the myth and imagination.

6 EMERGENCE OF MYTHOLOGICAL FICTION AS POPULAR LITERATURE IN 21ST CENTURY INDIA

The beginning of the twenty-first century marked a square change in production within Indian Literature and in peculiarlly, mythological fiction. Until this time myths were exclsuively confined within religious texts and were communicated through epics, folklore, and storytelling and were primarily used in ritualistic, pedagogic, and devotional purposes. Come the early 2000s, mythological fiction reached a new level in marketing and readership. This forging a new convergence between contemporary literary forms and marketing and readership sensibilities that focused on the ancient narratives. This literary genre that incorporates myths, fantasy, and adventure, many millions in this country are hooked and are considered mainstream bestsellers. And now, contemporary mythological fiction holds bestsellers, and under it lays various socio and cultural phenomenon. The gap and the socio and cultural phenomenon of the gap in modern urban narratives that are spiritually void and devoid of structure is filled with fast paced urban living and globalization, and in the narrative the modern condition is contrasted with the storytelling of a culture. And this isn't just a gap that exists in contemporary socio and urban formed narratives. It can also be found within the phenomenon of modern inter and cross country globalization and folklore. By turning ancient stories into something fun to read and easy to understand, mythological fiction meets these demands. These novels recreate mythology within an emotional framework and focus on things that today's readers want, are worried about, and care about, unlike academic or religious retellings (Bushra, T. J. 2024).

A major sign of this literary trend has been the incredible popularity of writers like Amish Tripathi, Ashok Banker, and Devdutt Pattanaik. Amisk Tripathi's The Shiva Trilogy (2010–2013) is an example of how the genre of mythological fiction became popular in India. Tripathi presents Shiva as a hero, a mortal, complete with extraordinary powers, moral reasoning, and deep philosophy. Tripathi cleverly presents myth as he remains faithful to Indian mythology's grandeur, moral complexities, and epic scope. The novels straddling the genre of fantasy literature- with mystical substances, secret cults, and cosmic battles- and Indian myth are the reasons for the phenomenal success of the books. The success of the books, which have been sold in millions, is a testimony to the reach and popularity of myth-based fiction. Ashok Banker, another leading figure in this literary movement, has also been a pioneer in popular

reinterpreting mythological narratives. His Ramayana Series (2000–2005) transformed the epic tale of Rama for modern audiences and retained the moral and cultural significance of the epic by presenting it in a novelistic, serialized format. Banker's version added layers of thrill, journey, and mental contemplation, turning the Ramayana from a holy book into an interesting piece of fiction. This was a step in the mainstream, 21st century Indian literature in which the focus was rewriting established Indian literature and myths to achieve a balance of literary and profit goals.

7. AMISH TRIPATHI: LIFE, CAREER, AND LITERARY JOURNEY

Amish Tripathi is one of the first people that comes to mind when someone is asked to name an author in the Indian literary mythological fiction, mytho-fantasy, and contemporary and myth bibliotherapy genres. He was born on October 18, 1974, in Mumbai and the rest of his life and education from there shaped his literary life. He was raised in a culturally rich environment in and around Mumbai, with a good exposure of Indian epics, mythology and philosophy literature. This, coupled with an eagerness to learn of history and religion, formed the bedrock of his creativity. He moved on to higher studies and was trained in and achieved a Bachelor of Commerce degree at Sydenham College, which helped him in developing a structured and analytical approach to writing and storytelling. This formal education in commerce, as the rest of the world knows, is far from literature, mythology and storytelling, is where his navigation in commerce was a big hooked on literature and mythology. Tripathi also had a good run in the corporate sphere in finance, banking and management consulting which was to him like a professional literary world, where he learned about strategic planning, real research and project and scope finishing. He learned and strengthened his literary abilities in constructing complex writing by these formal jobs and on layered story, audience and psychology. Tripathi has often remarked that his corporate background gave him discipline, organizational skills, and a systematic approach to writing which were all instrumental in the writing of large and complex series like The Shiva Trilogy. The change from corporate professional to full-time author shows that the change was purposeful and strategic which in turn shows ambition and a strong love for literature and mythology (Chatterjee, R. 2023).

Tripathi’s literary journey received momentum when he published The Immortals of Meluha in 2010, the first volume of The Shiva Trilogy. The novel portray Lord Shiva, one of the revered lores in the Hindu mythology, and the hero of the saga as a human, a hero. The figure

of the hero is extraordinary and is venerated as semi divine for his ethical disposition. The book is illustrative and captures a hybrid attention of the historical, the mythical, and the fantasy. The fantasy element, skillfully woven, is a center point for drawing attention. The inaugural work is a forerunner for the author's subsequent works. It for the author's subsequent works operated as a catalyst in the genre of mythological fantasy focusing on the broader Indian readership and Indian diaspora. The novel signaled a maturity of Indian readership and a desirability of the myth and fantasy genre fusion. The Immortals of Meluha was followed by The Secret of the Nagas (2011) and The Oath of the Vayuputras (2013). The subsequent sequels completed The Shiva Trilogy, extending the world of narrative imagination, new characters and worlds, fables of political conflict, the moral and the ethical, and the fantasy as hidden realms, magic arms, and heavenly planes, wrapped in divine mystery. In his trilogy, Tripathi built upon the literary foundations he had already established with his trademark fast-paced narratives, strong character descriptions, world building, and attention to the philosophical aspects of a narrative. His novels do contain elements of entertainment, but they concentrate on the moral, ethical, and spiritual queries that guide the reader, focusing on the educative and contemplative aspects of mytho-fantasy. The popularity of the trilogy, signalled by several million copies sold, multiple translations into other languages, and continued interest from fans, has made Tripathi a prominent author in modern Indian literature.

8. CONCLUSION

Amish Tripathi’s novels exemplify a dynamic fusion of myth and fantasy, offering a fresh perspective on Indian mythological narratives while engaging contemporary readers. Through his reinterpretation of legendary figures and events, Tripathi humanizes the divine, creating characters that are morally complex, relatable, and capable of evoking deep emotional responses. The interplay of myth and fantasy in his works not only revitalizes traditional stories but also provides a platform to explore universal themes such as duty, justice, love, and the eternal struggle between good and evil. This critical review highlights that his narrative strategies—ranging from vivid world-building to intricate character arcs—play a crucial role in making ancient myths accessible to modern audiences without diluting their philosophical and cultural essence. Moreover, Tripathi’s novels contribute significantly to the popularization of Indian mythology, bridging the gap between scholarly discourse and mainstream readership. By examining the thematic, stylistic, and cultural dimensions of his works, this review underscores the enduring relevance of myth in contemporary literature and its potential

to inspire imaginative storytelling. In essence, Amish Tripathi's fusion of myth and fantasy not only entertains but also educates, reaffirming the timeless appeal of mythological narratives in shaping cultural identity and literary imagination in the 21st century.

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