



## A STUDY ON THE EVOLUTIONARY PATTERNS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS IN MYTHOLOGY RETELLINGS

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### ABSTRACT



This study determines the reasons for socio-cultural changes visible in contemporary Indian mythological retelling works. Mythological narratives function as mirrors, reflecting the societal ethos, values, and beliefs of the period, and hence undergo tremendous changes across times. The purpose of this research is to examine reasons for the evolution of mythological retellings through cultural lenses, identifying changes in narration, character depictions, and ideological foundations.

Furthermore, this research investigates how contemporary myth retellings uphold the traditional ideals and modern reinterpretations in response to the changing socio-cultural settings. It investigates various reinterpretations to identify the methods of preservation of the original myths with their essence, at the same time the purpose of their adaption to modern society norms. This research finally aims to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic interaction between mythology and society through an exploration of the Indian mythological retelling works that intend to present the complex interplay between mythological narratives explaining the connection of socio-cultural evolution with these ageless tales. Author adopted a postmodern approach to make this scholarship efficient and fact finding.

**.Keywords:** *Mythological Retelling; Socio-cultural changes; ideological foundations; Literary Studies; postmodernism.*



## INTRODUCTION

*The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary defines "retelling" as an action word type of the principal word "retell," which is defined as the "movement to recount a story once again, frequently in an alternate way" (1307). Mythology retelling is the act of writers' using creative license to retell and reimagine classic myths, tales, and folklore from many civilizations. Classic retellings offer new perspectives, concepts, and situations while mentioning the same fundamental elements of classic stories, such as gods, heroes, monsters, and epic adventures. Classic tales are given new life by these reimagining, which makes them engaging and pertinent for modern audiences. The mythological tales can be retold in novels, short stories, plays, poems, and even visual media such as TV shows and movies. (Ganagatharam A, 2002)*

*Along with the psychological, moral, and philosophical elements of the original stories, they typically address contemporary themes. When traditional tales, legends, myths, and beliefs frequently feature gods, heroes, supernatural beings, and cosmological explanations are categorized as mythology, retellings socialize them and present them according to the needs of current societies. In human living, myths and retellings fulfill a variety of functions. They help the members of a group or community to usually carry a sense of shared history and belongingness by reflecting and reinforcing their cultural identity. (Ratnaparkhi, 2015) Myths provide a framework for comprehending the world by explaining natural events, human existence, creation, and the mysteries of life while they are closely entwined with religious rites and beliefs in many*

*communities, directing spiritual actions and providing moral advice. (Dorson M, 2014)*

The great Indian epic 'the Ramayana' is considered as live tradition not only in India, but in many other countries and continents around the world. The Ramayana indeed has been a source of ethical and moral ideals to Indian civilization from ancient times. However, it has been and continues to get questioned anytime as long as there is a tension or a crisis, be the matter concerns social or political or cultural or religious aspects. Even today, the fight between good and evil is associated with the Rama-Ravana conflict in socio-cultural contexts. It is the same case with Mahabharata, which is the Indian epic and the story of good and evil in the embodiment of Pandavas and Kauravas. Thus, both Ramayana and Mahabharata have been replicated in many literary and popular discourses and in mass and electronic media because of their grandeur, which corresponds with the Indian national imagination. In this context, Vikram Singh says,

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as sagas, mythological texts or religious texts, are two such epics that hold relevance even today with social and religious values still being drawn from them. Values and norms around gender and sexuality are also drawn from them. the characters of Sita and Draupadi or Rama and Arjun evoked as examples even today in conversations on loyalty, bravery and duty (Singh, 2017b)

It is essential to understand that in order to create a forward-looking perspective, the past must be interpreted and transformed from the depths of



insightfulness and wisdom provided by the literature. The civilians' outlook for learning from past and pave ways to future, and their inclination toward science and research have the ability to establish the groundwork for both that country's future and the contemporary, sophisticated lives of its citizens. Thus, it can be regarded that a modern view of myth provides us with its images while dealing with both science and technology effectively not missing the aspect of persistently reproducing the ancient stories and their characters in the form of thought-provoking ideals.

However, an individual's perception is always challenging when he or she determines to narrate the ancient legends' works. Thus, retelling authors usually ensure to carry the real essence of the original stories and human life while effectively conveying and upholding the societal norms, cultural ethics, and values for future generations, and influence the attitudes and behavior of individuals. In this way, they provide a framework for comprehending the world by explaining natural events, human existence, creation, and the mysteries of life. As a consequence, they provide prominence and receptive attention with their fascinating exploration that delving into the dynamic relationship between stories passed down through generations and the evolving societies that reinterpret them (Batra, 2017).

Adding to the above discussion, it can be observed that the cultural development of civilizations including shifts in social structures, values, and beliefs are formed and reformed by examining the mythical stories. The myths can be retold during cross-cultural encounters resulting in

the blending of stories from many cultures and the development of new adaptations. Evolutionary patterns found in myth retellings can be used to predict historical occurrences, migrations, conflicts, and changes in society. We are able to predict future developments and comprehend the current cultural shifts by studying the ways in which myths evolve over time. Thus, this analysis provides important insights into the intricacies of human civilization. To bring the intricacy and the prominence of this study, the researcher comes up with the following objectives.

#### OBJECTIVES

- To define mythology retellings and establish their prominence
- To identify the intention behind producing mythology retellings
- To screen the evolutionary Socio-cultural patterns of contemporary retelling including gender and other prominent perspectives
- To establish the need for the socio-cultural changes through retelling

#### METHODOLOGY

*A literary and cultural movement known as postmodernism emerged between the two world wars. The all-encompassing conception of existence and the universe is rejected by postmodern thought, which was shaped by the aftermath of the world wars. Its literature and culture give people the freedom to think liberally and perceive the world without being influenced by totalizing ideologies. The established conventions and old beliefs are called into question as new ways of thinking emerge. This presents a challenge to the pre-existing text's*



sovereignty, authenticity, and substantiality. Postmodernism departs from the conventional approach to explaining reality and truth by its narrative. Regarding this, Gerald Graff states in his essay, "The Myth of Postmodern Breakthrough" says, "The postmodern tendency in Literature and Literary criticism has been characterized as a 'breakthrough,' a significant reversal of dominant literary and social cultural directions of the traditional world" (SEP, 2015)

Thus, in this work a qualitative approach from postmodern perspective was adopted to see the socio-cultural changes in mythology retellings while referring to the findings from various studies transpired on social and cultural elements in Indian literature. Close reading of socio-cultural forces in myth retellings produced by prolific myth retelling writers was done to produce the relevant study effectively. The emphasis was on detecting patterns of change in societal structures, gender roles, moral codes, and power dynamics as they are mirrored in the select works.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When it comes to myths, literature has long been believed to be the most rewarding genre, as it serves to reflect the culture of a nation in the worldview. The complex interpreting and analyzing the word 'myth' has made it a difficult subject, and as a result, its application remains varied. Supporting the notion of evolution in myths, the statement from the Plato's Utopia (1516) can be mentioned here: "Myths are ideas or present concepts of a thought process. These principles have been written down to structure 'reality'. Socialism talks about the good governance,

and introduces the discourse of power" (Shejale, 2020). From their respective paths, philosophers, linguists, critics, semioticians, and theorists have all grappled with the discourse of myth. However, these many viewpoints on legendary storytelling revolve around a few fundamental ideas, such as power dynamics, signifier and signified via language, and representation. (Choudhury & Anish, 2023) The German Friedrich von Schelling, who claimed in his philosophy of mythology that myth is a mode of expression typical of a specific period in human evolution through which humans envision the Absolute, substantially sparked interest in myth. The 20th century saw a rise in scholarly interest in mythology due to Sigmund Freud's theories. (Choudhury & Anish, 2023). Myths can be understood as a record of the Indian regions' development and social evolution, rather than simply remaining as a collection of moral stories. It's a phenomenon which explains that everything evolves throughout time, with each successive generation bringing socio-cultural, political, and economic developments. (Batra, 2017). Indian literature has long been believed mythology to be the most rewarding genre, as it serves to reflect the culture of a nation in the worldview. In India, the classics, which narrate the history of ancient India, connected old Indian story telling with Indian society and culture. As these stories proceeded through time, they moved from place to place and created new rules of civilization that continued to establish social norms related to religion, traditions, gender, and caste codes. (Tripathi & Jagruti, 2023) Since literature helped to establish ideas about geography, time, and history, it has played a significant role in this imaginary. Indian literature has been heavily using



pre-modern Hindu religious texts, particularly the epics, for more than 200 years. The national imagination has constantly elevated the two Sanskrit epics to the status of the primary symbols of Hinduism. The British realist and modernist novels, which were introduced to India with the growth of print capitalism in the Empire, are examples of literary forms that have been used to further legitimize historical, religious, and cultural interpretations in popular discourse. While many myths from Hindu mythology are passed down orally, the epics' stories have undergone substantial translation, rewriting, and adaptation before being recorded in writing. (Kanjilal, 2017) The classics, which narrate the history of ancient India, connect old Indian story telling with Indian culture. As these stories proceed through time, they move from place to place and create new rules of civilization that continue to establish social norms related to religion, traditions, gender, and caste codes. Myths can be understood as a record of the Indian regions' development and social evolution, rather than simply remaining as a collection of moral stories. It's a phenomenon which explains that everything evolves throughout time, with each successive generation bringing socio-cultural, political, and economic developments. (Jacobsen, 2023). Based on the above arguments, the researcher focused on the reasons for the changes in socio-cultural aspects of retellings like gender roles, and other important perspectives that provide evidences from various literary studies to achieve the objectives.

## NEED FOR RETELLINGS IN MODERN AND POST MODERN SOCIETY

Retelling myths with an eye on the present aims to reconcile the ancient and the new. People can impart these moral lessons to future generations by retelling these stories. Cultures are not static; values, problems, and perceptions shift as well. They also support changes that make the stories more relevant to today's issues and points of view. By reinterpreting old myths to fit contemporary cultural, social, and political contexts, writers can explore subjects like power, identity, love, and fate in ways that resonate with today's readers. By offering voices to those who were excluded or silenced in the original narrative, these retellings can offer a more inclusive viewpoint.

Popular mythology frequently needs to be retold from a different angle in order to even out the uneven parts or to bring the tale into the present day without altering the basic idea (Rakhi K R, 2015). Canadian literary scholar Herman Northrope Fyre asserts that mythology is a part of every human society and that it is passed down, adapted, and changed through literature. Mythological literature tends to address the worries, anxiety, problems, desires, and other things that the ancestors faced. These problems still exist in contemporary society. Similarly, the conflict between good and evil is depicted in Vyasa Mahabharata which is also rewritten in the latest versions by different authors. However, Lieberman and Kirk (Lieberman & Kirk, 1970) mention that mythology may diverge from social norms eventually due to the changing circumstances. Therefore, a need of retelling the mythology from fresh perspective arises.



The branch of mythology that explains people's and civilizations' spiritual potential is summed up by contemporary theories. According to modern theorists, myths examine prevalent archetypes and clarify thought processes, particularly in connection to opposite pairings such as good and evil, morality and vice, etc. (Zheltukhina, 2015) It is evident that the mythical tales' retellings reflect or are a reflection of the era to which they belong. On the other hand, the Ramayana by Valmiki predates the ancient period. The Ramayana by R.K. Narayan and its pre-modern short stories, such as Amish Triparhi's Scion of Ikvaku, have given us new, contemporary, postmodern and logical ideas. These are simply a few instances of the endless production of content. The most intriguing thing that we see is how the stories maintain their magic and are still far more popular than other books, according to readers of the current generation. "The old retellings had a mystical sense to them, but now the authors are speaking through the youth's language and they are putting some logic and reasoning behind the stories which make them fascinating," (Singh, 2017a)

#### REASONS FOR SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGICAL RETELLING

Diversity in culture gives birth to variations in retellings. A myth may be reinterpreted according to local circumstances, modified to fit the cultural symbols of a different society, or its distinctive elements may be highlighted. According to Sanika (Kulkarni & Vidyapeeth, 2020), Different regions and their cultures may interpret myths in various ways based on their own perspectives, leading to variations in the retelling of the same story across different regions. The researcher finds three major

purposes of Indian mythological retellings which the modern writers intend to achieve.

1. Giving voice to female characters who, despite possessing tremendous virtues, abilities, and potential, were forced to stay subordinate in the patriarchal environments of myths
2. Giving voices to the oppressed or wicked by recounting myths from their points of view in order to do justice to their ideas in social, cultural, and political spheres
3. To preserve the culture and use idealized tales and mythological characters to bind the younger generation to the foundations of civilization.

Based on the observation of above reasons, the researcher would like to comprehend the societal and cultural changes occurred in retelling works, comparing them to the original myths.

#### 1. Retellings with Reference to Women Characters Including Changing Gender Roles

Due to the sexist mindset of the governing males, women are typically stereotyped when they are represented in myths. In every mythology, gender prejudices typically create meek and marginalized female figures. Negative characters also refer to those female characters who defy these norms. In western retellings, Margaret Atwood used the literary personas of well-known figures from classical mythology, such as Penelope, the Sirens, Sekhmet, and others, to critique modern patriarchy through a feminist lens and give voice to women who are generally portrayed as perennially submissive in



western society. The way that Atwood skillfully incorporates classic mythology into modern society raises important questions about why myths are typically written from a male perspective and why mistreated mythological women remain silent. She also gives these women the voice they were denied in their original stories.

Coming to Indian mythology retelling, books that question conventional gender roles and present feminist viewpoints explore the ethical issues faced by Rama and delve into moral intricacies and human weaknesses, Valmiki's Ramayana presents Rama as a noble hero. Sita's character in Valmiki's Ramayana is described as pious and subservient. She is always obedient to her father or husband. But in contemporary retellings, Sita's autonomy, resiliency, and inner power are frequently highlighted. We can see this powerful representation of Sita in Devdutt Pattanaik's work 'Sita: The Illustration of Ramayana'(2013), in Amish Tripathi's work Sita: The Warrior of Mithila'(2017), in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work The forest enchantments'(2019), in Volga's work The Liberation of Sita'(2015) etc. These writers delve into Sita's viewpoint and autonomy. This gives us an evidence that modern retellings emphasize challenging patriarchal conventions and empower female protagonists. Similarly, Samhitha Arani concentrates on Sita's viewpoint in her retelling of the Ramayana, emphasizing her agency and experiences that go beyond being Rama's wife. It questions the conventional interpretation of Sita as a submissive character.

The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tells the Mahabharata from Draupadi's

perspective. It explores her feelings, aspirations, and hardships, providing a perspective on her that goes beyond that of a mistreated woman. Devdutt stated numerous women, including Draupadi, Sita, Satyavati, Surpankha, and numerous others, who raised concerns, sought clarification, and ensured their voices were heard rather than ignored. A few of these women even suffered fatalities or lost their stability in order for their existence to be acknowledged, like Amba in the Mahabharata. He draws attention to the underappreciated facets of female characters, which may include issues with Indian women's rights, liberty, and current state of womanhood.

If we take Yayati from the Mahabharata and Dashratha from the Ramayana, he his daughters Madhavi and Shanta for his own gain. Devdutt uncovers a lot about the treatment of women in ancient Indian society and culture, as well as its ramifications for modern times, through analyzing these individuals. His reworking of female characters as intelligent, independent, and powerful women argues that gender norms and prevalent mindsets are to blame for the way that culture is reframed. As a result, Devdutt tells the tales of various characters, including courageous Shakuntala, fearless Draupadi, courageous Urmila, wise Kunti, sane Gandhi, powerful Satyavati, and courageous Amba. His writings encourage society to think critically and delve more into Indian epics. In the same way, Devdutt Pattanaik's retelling work, "Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata," offers greater insights into the motivations and deeds of the Mahabharata characters by focusing on the moral and psychological struggles they encounter.



Irawati Karve's "Yuganta: The End of an Epoch" is a partially retelling. It offers sociocultural and philosophical interpretations of the Mahabharata characters while critically analyzing them, giving readers a window into modern society. Another book that questions traditional ideas of gender roles is "The Pregnant King" by Devdutt Pattanaik, which retells a Mahabharata episode to examine the idea of gender fluidity and inclusivity. These retellings demonstrate a change in emphasis by presenting various viewpoints, challenging conventional wisdom, and tackling modern sociocultural concerns all while redesigning and retelling Indian myths. They provide a vision of how the archaic stories continue to see the changes, reflecting the evolving values and concerns of the society.

## 2. Giving Voice and Perspective to Marginalized or Negative Characters

In myth retellings, creators infuse their viewpoints and goals, which shapes how themes, characters, and stories are portrayed. They provide distinct interpretations while navigating social norms. Retellings frequently incorporate modern societal aspects into the legendary story, such as gender roles, power dynamics, political beliefs, or environmental concerns. Cultural symbols and metaphors are included into myth retellings, which interpret them in light of prevalent ideologies, historical events, and society norms. The socio-makers manage social expectations by striking a balance between creativity and tradition, authenticity and adaptation, and taking into account the reactions of various audiences to their retellings. A comprehensive framework for comprehending how myth retellings in literature and the arts interact with

socio-cultural contexts, encourage a range of interpretations, and highlight the dynamic interaction between artists, audiences, and society expectations is offered by literary and cultural studies.

This care is taken because, the cultural origins, preconceptions, and expectations of the audience influence how they react to myth retellings. A person's perception and understanding of myths are influenced by their cultural background and social background, depending on the viewpoints of the audience and the cultural setting, interpretations can differ and may misfire also greatly if not sensible enough. So, another goal of reinterpretations can be to provide more authority to characters that were previously underutilized or inaccurately portrayed.

For example, Anand Neelakantan reimagines Ravana in his work *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, which is a retelling of the Ramayana from Ravana's point of view, challenging the conventional narrative and questioning accepted ideas of good and evil. M.T. Vasudevan Nair's Malayalam book "Randamoozham" tells the story of the Mahabharata from Bhima's point of view while delving into his inner turmoil and feelings. It portrays a provincial view of the mythical tale. However, retelling myths again can provoke moral debate among listeners, raising issues about the moral teachings taught and their applicability in today's world.

## 3. Connecting Current Generation to Roots of the Society

The way myths are portrayed in different media (books, movies, video games) can have a big impact on how youth of the society views and understands them. The visualization and retelling of myths are





frequently influenced by new technologies, which in turn affects the myths' cultural relevance and reception. Revisions to key moral features of myths may be prompted by shifts in society ethics, emphasizing or reevaluating particular actions or choices made by the characters while connecting new generations to the age-old stories and their preaching in modern ways. Literary and cultural studies provide important insights into this process. Myth retellings convey cultural identity to youngsters through a variety of artistic mediums, conserving legacy and transforming these stories to appeal to modern audiences. Through the introduction of fresh interpretations, vantage points, and reproducing of classic tales, literature and the arts aid in the growth of the canon of mythology.

Retellings frequently incorporate modern societal aspects into the legendary story, such as gender roles, power dynamics, political beliefs, or environmental concerns. Cultural symbols and metaphors are rationally and scientifically included into myth retellings by modern authors, which interpret them in light of prevalent ideologies, historical events, and society norms. The sociocultural setting influences how myth retellings are received and interpreted by the public especially younger generations in order to make them feel an inclination towards their cultural roots.

## CONCLUSION

Mythology retellings demonstrate how myths adapt to address modern issues and resonate with new generations. They also represent changing society values, beliefs, and customs. Myths are transmitted and become syncretized, incorporating features from

other cultures and emphasizing how societies are interconnected and how stories are constantly exchanged. Retellings provide as windows into the socio-cultural evolution of a society, illuminating changes in gender roles, power structures, moral standards, and technological breakthroughs throughout history. The interaction between creativity and tradition is demonstrated by mythological retellings, when authors recast old tales while honoring cultural authenticity and legacy.

Gaining a greater understanding of the evolution of culture and societal change requires an understanding of these evolutionary tendencies in myth retellings. It gives us an understanding of how cultures change and adapt across time, giving us a prism through which to examine the fluidity and interconnection of cultural representations. Retellings of myths function as cultural artifacts that shed light on human nature, thought processes, moral principles, and the means by which civilizations disseminate information and ideas. Through recognizing the role myths play in forming identities and establishing links between historical customs and modern settings, the study of evolutionary patterns contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage.

Analyzing socio-cultural changes in mythology retelling involves a multi-layered examination, considering historical, societal, and cultural factors that shape the evolution of these stories. It reflects the intricate relationship between mythology and the societies that continuously reinterpret and reimagine these timeless tales.

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