



The Women Characters of Amish Tripathi: A Postfeminist Perspective

<https://doi.org/10.59136/lv.2024.2.2.11>

Dr. Saroj Bala

Associate Professor of English
Department of Humanities
Delhi Technological University
Delhi (India)
sarjobala@dtu.ac.in

Dr. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi

Associate Professor of English
Department of Humanities
Delhi Technological University
Delhi (India)
rajivdwivedi@dtu.ac.in

Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the women characters of Amish Tripathi in his *Shiva Trilogy* and *Ram Chandra Series* with a post-feminist perspective. In the recent trend of mythological fiction, women characters are given the roles of protagonists for voicing their emotions and decisions. From their shadowed existence to their new avatar of prominence and strength they have become role models for the young generation. Tripathi has subverted the characterization of women with extraordinary virtues. His Sita is the pride of Malayputras who confer on her the coveted title of 'Vishnu' for making her accountable for the welfare of the people by destroying evil. He very carefully associates masculine qualities with women to prove their wisdom and power. The paper focuses on Tripathi's defiance of patriarchal society by presenting a world of women who possess masculine qualities along with utmost femininity.

Key Words: Post-feminism, Empowered Women; Femininity; Feminism, Mythology.

Introduction

Indian mythology is an essential part of the literature of different languages with ancient stories depicting events that highlight the patriarchal set-up of society. The mythology of other civilisations also generally neglects the female characters in their androcentric stories. Tripathi's novels also analyse conventional feminist ethics and recognise the potential of women as worthy partners in personal and professional life. Gender stereotypes are shattered to convince readers that women are not inferior to their male counterparts in any way.



The current literary scenario of popular literature is filled with the genre of mythological fiction in different Indian languages including the English language. Well-known writers like Ashok Banker, Ashwin Sanghi, Chitra Divakaruni, Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Anand Neelakantan etc. are minting money from their books based on mythology. The feminist retellings of our epics are not static but flexible which gives ample opportunity to mould stories according to the requirements. Pandey, S and Jodha (2023) state that “Re-visiting of myth is an emerging trend in Indian literature in English, particularly concerning the post-feminist perspective of giving voice to the voiceless, describing Sanatan women’s talent and capabilities and creating a new identity for them, wrongly portrayed as inferior to men” (163).

Some women characters in Indian mythology are portrayed as weak and submissive for the sake of showing them as perfect but some are demonized to the extent of making them look villainous. However, in the current era, all such characters are being given prominence to show them as humans with normal vices and virtues. The writers of mythological fiction are justifying their stand in the patriarchal system by fictionalizing original stories of epics. The wave of feminism has influenced these writers to subvert the narratives to give voice to neglected characters. Women protagonists from epics and scriptures especially in TV serials and Web-series are being appreciated by women viewers. Amish Tripathi has created a niche in the mythological fiction category by taking inspiration from Indian mythological characters. He has redefined images of women to alter the traditional image that reflected a meek and docile nature. Femininity is a social construct which includes modesty, softness, kindness, beauty, gentleness, empathy, humility, sensitivity, affection, tenderness etc. Thiraviadurai and Shanthi (2021) praise Tripathi:

An Indian iconic figure Amish Tripathi has come up with refreshing new ideas of how the age-old mythical stories could be written in today’s dynamic setting. With many gods and Goddesses, Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses instilled in our childhood memories, it has become ever so exciting to pick up the next book that caters to our never-ending imagination and feed our hunger of more such tales. (27).

Revisiting myths paves the way for subversion and inversion in the original story thereby inviting flak from the religious and literary circles. The heady mixture of mythology with suspense, fantasy and thrill has created a new genre that provides lucre and publicity to the authors. This new trendsetter in the field of popular literature is encouraging directors to make web series and movie adaptations of these works. The influence of feminism is clearly visible in the narratives of these works.



Feminism has influenced authors and intellectuals to criticize every act and decision of men and society from a different perspective. According to Western critic Pam Morris:

Feminism is a perception based on two fundamental premises: (1) that gender difference is the foundation of structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences. This perception provides feminism with its double agenda: to understand the social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender inequality and then to change them. (63).

The genuine concern for the rights of women in social, economic, political, and personal spheres is regarded as very important for the wholesome growth of a society. Now after the third wave of feminism post-feminism has replaced the previous version of feminism. The paper attempts to analyse contemporary mythological fiction authored by Amish Tripathi in the light of post-feminist theory which has given power to the less-powerful.

Literature Review

The replacement of feminism by post-feminism has caused a revolution in literary and academic writings, especially in popular cultural representations. Earlier the criticism of retellings with a feministic perspective has been in fashion for quite some time for example Devi and Srividhya (2020) claim that “In the age-old mythical narratives, women were seen from the androcentric Perspective and were portrayed as creatures that are inferior to men by all means” (504). She further observes “Revisionist myth-making especially, serves as a powerful weapon for the feminist writers as they can rethink and revise the image of silent, passive women of the past and envision them from a different perspective. These reconstructions of ancient women’s identity have gone a long way in demolishing their socially constructed inferior status” (506). The proliferation of feministic versions of epics gives voice to the women who were otherwise neglected and relegated to the margins. Therefore, subversion is very common in these modernized tales based on mythology. Writers have changed the story to make it relevant to contemporary society where empowered women are ruling the roost. In some cases, the plight of mythological characters is identified with personal grief as Nina Paley does in *Sita Sings the Blues* where she describes her agony of separation from her spouse.

The fact that the discourse of feminism has declined leading to a decrease in the discussion of issues of feminist rights and equality, etc. has found ample illustrations in the works of Tripathi written in a postfeminist spirit. His characters no longer crave for the establishment of their



identity and equality of treatment vis-vis their male counterparts. Their very roles are unequivocally parallel to their male counterparts and they assume their own societal impressions represented in the works of Tripathi. Whether it is Sita, Sunaina or any other woman character in the *Ramchandra series* or Sati in the *Shiva Trilogy*, Amish has presented them as a consciously mature character with the critical acumen to understand the ordeal of time.

The market demand for books on mythology, epics, and legends is increasing every day owing to their popularity among readers and viewers. Sundari (2020) declares that “None of the myths and the fictional works were created for the use of one particular period of people. Only those who understand the greatness of the ideologies in myths can conclude that they are for all ages and all times. Myth encompasses the knowledge of our forefathers, the scientific miracles of today’s scenario and cognizance for the future generation” (3223). Along the same lines, Dwivedi, RR (2020) claims that

While myth as a cultural reservoir of patriarchal hegemonic structure has cast women in a subordinated, submissive profile, the retellings of the same drawing parallel at any level and to any extent is an undaunted endeavour to look into the state of affairs, question the structure and re-invent the narrative against the spatio-temporal realities. (35).

The last stage of Feminism does not ask for more power as women have already become empowered. This trace of post-feminist traits is visible in all the works of Tripathi. Sonthalia (2019) argues that “In the 21st century when women have acquired equal rights in all spheres of life, the subject of women empowerment provided a better platform to women to raise their unheard voices through art forms” (95). Similarly, Winmayil (2020) finds that “The modern versions of the epics giving narrative shift to the (s)heroes have the psychological constructions of the tale. The writers Divakaruni, Atwood and Tripathi unearth the animus within the feminine psyche of the heroines of the epics that defy the basic social constructs of the society” (234). Tripathi has deliberately showered strength and professionalism on his women characters as during the waves of feminism only protests and rebellion were emphasized.

Luthra (2017) states “These feminist appropriations connect with the wide sympathy for Sita’s suffering, as well as the admiration for her fortitude and dignity. However, the feminist versions of Sita are generally more vocal and forthright in their protests, which incorporate contemporary understandings of patriarchy and its effects” (144). According to Beauvoir (1989), “Woman is objectified and pushed to the lower rung of the social ladder by superior male consciousness and man’s dominant position in society by controlling the economic,



political and religious fronts” (143). Many social and cultural factors influence femininity and masculinity in a particular society.

The new woman of Tripathi outshines her male counterpart by her personality and conviction. Mand, Anjali S Nair & Meera B (2019) argue that “Male characters often outshine female characters who are mostly calm and delicate. This creates an image of women as weak and diffident. From ancient times onwards in the Indian context, we find women subservient to men though they exhibit great emotional perseverance and natural adaptability to their circumstances” (157). The role of the protagonist in the retellings is given to women which highlights their ideology and dreams. In this context, Singh (2017) argues that “A feminist claim to the retelling of the epics is, therefore, extremely significant as they make women, with their gender and other marginalities, central to these stories as narrators or as lead characters” (385).

The Shiva Trilogy

The post-feminist perspective lent towards women characters of the prominent mythological Retellings such as Amish has given a new dimension to them. As such they emerge out more appropriate in their roles juxtaposed against their male counterparts. These women characters realise their potential as equally comparable to the male characters and thus, they refuse to be stereotyped. The post-feminist venture of the authors redefines the identity of the women characters in their mythical retellings. They stand out as articulate women who confront the realities of life. They claim the space deserved by them and assert their rights accordingly. The feeble voices of women which were not audible in literature in general and Indian mythology in particular are treated kindly by many authors, especially Amish Tripathi. He has empowered them in his works by lending them assertive roles. In this context, Sonthalia (2019) declares:

Amish Tripathi took a rare initiative and broke the traditional stereotype presentation of gender roles in his Shiva Trilogy. These novels replicate the post-feminism waves of empowerment and independence and renovate the focus on the female. Female characters like Sati, Veerini Renuka, Ayurvati, Kanakhala, and Kali are the strong representatives of women. These women characters break the conservative image of traditional women and deny to confine themselves in family boundaries. They make an affirmative place as a role model for other women. These characters redefine the idea of self-assertion and struggle to get rid of social evils like discrimination based on caste, marginalization of people, honour killing, widow remarriage etc (96).

Sati is no less than Shiva in valour as her last fight with an Egyptian mercenary Swuth, forces her opponent to give her an honourable death. In the third book of the Shiva Trilogy, *The Oath*



of the *Vayuputras* (2013) Amish writes: “Swuth went down on one knee. He had to give Sati an honourable death”...“Killing you shall be my life’s honour” (478). The scene of her fight with the lions to save villagers in *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) is exemplary, “Sati swung as she neared a massive lioness, turning smoothly with the movement, slicing through the nose and eye of the beast. As the lioness retreated, howling, Sati turned in the same smooth motion to attack a lion in front of her” (235). Eventually, she sacrifices her life for Meluha when she dies fighting with the Egyptian mercenaries. Kali is assertive in challenging ancient rules which discriminated against and excluded Nagas from the mainstream. In *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) she challenges Daksha, her treacherous father who abandoned her after her birth due to extra growth on her body, “Kali reached for her sword. ‘I am in the mood to challenge you to an Agnipariksha right now, you repulsive goat!’” (326). Regarding the empowerment assigned by Tripathi to his women characters Pandey, S and Jodha (2023) argue “They not only address the expectations of the audience but also serve desirable social (towards gender equality) ends. Tripathi’s bewitching depiction of feminine patterns bids goodbye to the stereotyped submissive image of women denying their patriarchal subjugation” (173). The power-packed roles of these women are unique for the readers as Meluhan society follows ancient rules without justifying their relevance. Lady Ayurvati is the chief of Medicine, Kankhala is the Prime Minister and Sati and Kali are proficient in war tactics. Veerini grieves for Daksha’s wrong decisions and continuously warns her husband of the consequences. In this regard Sundari, (2020) claims that “In all the three novels of the Shiva Trilogy, women characters like Sati, Ayurvati, Kankhala and Kali showed their leadership quality by their knowledge, valour and administration” (3226). Tripathi’s positive approach towards womanhood is laudable as not a single woman’s character and action goes against righteousness. Instead of being miserable in the face of adversity they calmly accept their fate and fight for justice. Dharmadhikari (2018) states that “In his effort to portray Lord Shiva in Shiva Trilogy Amish Tripathi tried to subvert the meta-narratives of gender, caste, nationality, religion and a few more” (01). He further mentions that

In the portrayal of Sati Amish achieved an epitome of womanhood. Even if Sati is a Vikarma woman Shiva gives her fair chance of Agnipariksha with Tarak, a great warrior who challenged the presence of Sati, a Vikarma woman, in the auspicious occasion of a Yagna, a fire sacrifice. Sati proves herself as a fierce warrior and defeats Tarak. The marginalisation on the basis of gender was wiped out when Sati triumphed the fire sacrifice by accepting and defeating Tarak in a dual. (03-04).

Ram Chandra Series



Amish Tripathi has broken the socio-economic and political stereotypes of female characters in his Ram Chandra Series as well by juxtaposing mythological women characters against the modern version of women in contemporary society. These books are based on the all-time great epic Ramayana but the twist in the original story has made them a different narrative with characters having human qualities. The women characters in '*Ram-Scion of Ikshvaku*' (2015) are not portrayed as weak and intimidated by men but as self-respecting, self-dependent, and courageous individuals. Ram, the protagonist himself praises Sita's intelligence and martial skills. She does not ask for political equality, economic rights, or social identity, instead fights alongside Ram with courage and conviction. In *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017) her extraordinary virtues impress Guru Vishwamitra who confers on her the most revered title of the seventh 'Vishnu', which demands courage and responsibility. He allows her to study culture, geography, and many more subjects.

Some of them were purely educational on science, astronomy, and medicine, others were subtle lessons designed to help her clearly define, question, confront or affirm her views on various topics like masculinity, femininity, equality, hierarchy, justice, and freedom. (164).

Her indifference towards her appearance with battle scars changes when she becomes conscious of them as Ram notices a prominent scar on her hand:

Ram's eyes had glazed over once again. He was staring at Sita's hands in almost loving detail. Only the Almighty or Ram himself knew the thoughts that were running through his head. For probably the first time in her life, Sita felt self-conscious. She looked at her battle-scarred hands. The scar on her left hand was particularly prominent. Her hands weren't, in her own opinion, particularly pretty. (208).

King Janak takes pride in Sita's bravery and extraordinary achievements when he observes her character closely. She is a mentor to her younger sister Urmila when she tells her, "Life is not only about what we want but also what we must do. We don't have just rights, but we also have duties." (295).

Sita's mother Sunaina's wisdom gets reflected when she warns Sita: "For the sake of Dharma, you must aim for equality and balance in society...But don't fall into the trap of stereotypes. Don't assume that the powerful are always bad or that the powerless are always good. There is good and bad in everyone" (36).

Lavanya (2017) finds the novel completely unconventional in its portrayal of Lady Sita. (55). Unlike a traditional mythological story in which Manthara, Kaikeyi, and Surpankha are shown as villainous characters, Sita's pious character is juxtaposed against them. Tripathi's Sita, the



protagonist efficiently performs the role of the Prime Minister of Mithila and proves her worth for the title of 'Vishnu'. Other women characters are also given high positions in society where they play crucial roles in their chosen domain. Kaikeyi is shown as strong and courageous and saves King Dashratha in the battle of Karchapa which affects the status of the Sapt Sindhu empire positively. Manthara is portrayed as a very wealthy businesswoman of Sapt Sindhu who manipulates the Sapt Sindhu's commerce and state affairs. Nilanjana is a successful medical professional, adept in her specialisation. Other writers have also attempted to interpret the epic Ramayana from the point of view of Sita like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, Arni Samhita's *Sita's Ramayana*, Sara Joseph's *The Vigil* and Volga's *Liberation of Sita*. Tripathi's fictionalized version of the *Ramayana* and the unconventional story of Sita is much appreciated by readers and critics. His post-feministic empowered women defy all odds to perform their duties and seek justice for the marginalised people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the bold and empowered mythological characters of Tripathi are a reflection of his post-feminist perspective. Sati is adept in martial skills along with talents in dance, music and administration. Sita is the born 'Vishnu' for the chief of Malayputras who admire her leadership and dedication to her work. The masculinization of her character is juxtaposed against the conventional femininity of the patriarchal society where womanhood stands for docility and piety. Tripathi's other women also possess wisdom, courage, and individuality for their personal and professional duties. The study has explored the post-feministic concern of the writer in the *Shiva Trilogy* and the *Ram Chandra series* where women are already empowered by breaking stereotypical gender roles assigned to them since time immemorial.

Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. H.M. Parshley. Trans and Ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Mand, Meera, Anjali S Nair & Meera B. "Concealed Countenances: A Re-Conceptualization of Sita in Amish's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* and Volga's *Liberation of Sita*." *IJITEE*, Vol. 8, Issue 7C, 2019.
- Morris, Pam. *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1993.
- Pandey, S and Avinash Jodha. "Empowered Women in the Selected Works of Amish Tripathi." *IIS Univ. J. A.*, Vol. 11, Issue 04, 2023.
- Lavanya, S. "Sita- 'The Born Vishnu' in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: The Warrior of Mithila*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol. 05, issue 4, 2017.
- Luthra, Rashmi. "Clearing Ground: Women-Centered Interpretations of the Indian Epics." *Feminist Formations*, Vol. 26, No 2, 2014.
- Singh, Vikram. "Reclaiming Female Identity: Feminist retelling of the Hindu Epic." *The Criterion: An*



- International Journal in English*, Vol. 8, Issue-ii, 2017.
- Winmayil, B. "Mythological (S)Heroes in Mythopoeic Fiction." *The International Journal of Analytical and Experimental Modal Analysis*, Vol. XII, Issue I, 2020.
- Sonthalia, Sujata. "Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy: A Saga of Women's Bravery, Courage and Mettle through the lenses of Traditional Ethics." *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field*, Vol. 05, Issue 11, 2019.
- Sundari, Thiripura R. "Gender Equanimity in Shiva Trilogy." *IJCRT*, Vol. 08, Issue 07, 2020.
- Thiraviadurai, S and Shanthi, R. "Myth Making Political Ability of Sita in Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*." *RJELAL*, Vol. 09, Issue 1, 2021.
- Tripathi, Amish. *The Immortals of Meluha*. New Delhi, Westland Ltd, 2010.
- . *The Secret of the Nagas*. New Delhi, Westland Ltd, 2011.
- . *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. New Delhi, Westland Ltd, 2013.
- . *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. India: Westland Press, 2017.

