

Cultural Mooring in Amish Tripathi's *Raavan:* *Enemy of Aryavarta*

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Abstract

Modern Indian writers had started to review and retell the mythical stories in different perspectives. Amish Tripathi is one among those authors of the new era. His contribution to mythology gave him an outstanding place in Indian English Literature. His books are famous for combining myths with fiction and for creating a new world for the same. In *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*, the third book of the Ram Chandra Series; has cultural moorings such as code of conduct, traditions, customs and religious practices, lifestyle, music, ethics of war, festivals, languages. Though India has its cultural variations based on regional, linguistics its basic culture is bound to Hindu civilisation. This paper explores the ancientness and mythopoeic facets embedded in the book.

Keywords: cultural moorings, ancientness, mythopoeic facets, mythology, cultural history.

Indian writing in English has an independent status in the realm of World literature. Indian novels dealt with wide range of themes and continue to reflect traditional social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life. Over the last few years, mythological fiction has gained vast grounds in India. A number of Indian writers such as Amish Tripathi, Anuja Chandra Mouli, Kavita Kane, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Devdutt Pattanaik, and Anand Neelakandan proved to be the most outstanding authors who have brought a massive change in mythological platform.

Amish Tripathi is one of the most sought-after writers for his Shiva trilogy which comprises of *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of Nagas*, and *The Oath of Vayuputras*. All the three gained immense popularity and cult leadership. His fourth book was the first of the Ram Chandra series, titled *The Scion of Ishvakuku* and the second is *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*. Amish had recently launched his third book of this series *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*.

Throughout the history of India, Indian culture has been heavily influenced by dharmic religions. They have been credited with shaping much of Indian philosophy, literature, architecture, art, music, food, customs. There were various beliefs and practices that made them understand the histories and myths in a better way.

Culture is the way of life of groups of people their behaviour, beliefs, the values, and the symbols that they accept generally without thinking about them and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to another. In short culture is a symbolic communication. Mooring can be seen in the sense that it provides degree of shelter, stability and some sort of safeness.

In *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*, Amish had embedded the story over the cultural history of India and exposed the readers to the unknown beliefs and practiced that had been once practised in ancient India. The book depicts the story of Raavan, a formidable teenage pirate filled with equal parts of courage, cruelty and fearsome resolve who was giant among men to conquer, plunder, and seize the greatness which he thinks is right. Cultural history had been traced to explore the magnificence of Indian

history and to understand the greatness of ancestors. Various practices and beliefs of ancient India such as Vishnuhood, worship of kanyakumaris, the secrecy of Nagas and the brilliance of ancient Indians in science, theology, numbers, the concepts of ancient Indians such as one god, karma, dharma, equality and their contribution to art and music had been traced and explored in this paper.

According to an ancient Indian tradition, towering leaders, the greatest among greats, who could become the propagators of goodness and harbingers of a new way of life, were recognized with the title 'Vishnu'. There had been six Vishnu's and the tribe of Malayaputras had been founded by the sixth Vishnu, Lord Parshu Ram. The Malayaputra had recognized the seventh Vishnu; Sita.

In many parts of India, there was a tradition of venerating the *Kanyakumari*, literally the *Virgin Goddess*. "It was believed that the Mother Goddess resided, temporarily, within the bodies of certain chosen young girls. Those girls were worshipped as living Goddesses" (16). People came to them for advice and prophecies—they counted even kings and queens among their followers—until they reached puberty, at which time it was believed that the Goddess moved into the body of another pre-pubescent girl. There were many kanyakumari temples in India. Raavan took hold on the words of one such Kanyakumari which drives the plot to the next level.

All across India, people believed that birth deformities were the consequences of a cursed soul, of bad karma carrying over from the previous birth. "And such blighted people were called Nagas" (23). Raavan had a purple outgrowth from his naval—birth deformity proving that he was a Naga. Khumbhakarna, Raavan's brother was also a Naga who had been born with the outgrowths on the ears, shoulders.

"Many Indians believed in the existence of tribes of demonic warriors that adorned themselves with relics from the bodies of their bravest adversaries. In doing so, they were said to transfer to themselves the strength of the dead men" (34). The Lankan soldiers, thoroughly loyal to Raavan, believed and propagated the legend that the pendant around his neck was made from the remains of an archenemy's

hand. The brilliance of ancient Indians in interweaving theology with science in name of rituals and astronomy is revealed.

The people of India, the followers of dharmic way, attached a huge significance to the number. The lotus in the Vaidhyanath temple had one hundred and eight petals which is significant. They believed that it was divine number repeated again and again in the structure of the universe. The diameter of the sun was a hundred and eight times the diameter of the earth. There were several other examples of this number appearing almost magically in the universe.(43)

Over time it had been incorporated into many rituals. For instance, it was recommended that a mantra be chanted a hundred and eight times.

The ancient depiction of the One God was also presented where

'The lingam' was in the shape of an half egg, and some ancients believed that represented the Brahmanda, or the Cosmic Egg, which allowed creation to coalesce. Others believed that it was a representation of masculine energy and potential. At the base of the lingam was the yoni, often translated as 'womb', but literally the 'origin' or source, a symbol of feminine energy and potential. The union of the lingam and the yoni represented creation, a result of the partnership between the masculine and feminine, an alliance between passive Space and active Time from which all life, indeed all creation, originated.(44)

Liturgy performed in the Vaidyanath Temple preached equality in action. There is no differentiation and freedom from right and wrong. And they reveal in the union with god.

Rich men danced next to their visibly poor compatriots. Students pirouetted next to their teachers. People with deformities chanted beside soldiers blessed with formidably fit bodies. Purist priests danced with hedonist aghoras. Women danced with men and transgender people. Children with their parents. People of all denominations and castes. Indians and non-Indians.(45)

Most temple complexes had ponds for the use of the local population. Food was provided for the poor in the form of prasada. Free primary education was made available for children who lived in the villages nearby. Villagers could access basic medical help at temples. In addition, most temples acted as storehouse where essential grains were kept to provide for people when the rain failed. If they were exceptionally wealthy they even paid for local buildings projects such as houses for the poor and check dams on streams. “Historically, temples in India were not just the centers of worship, but also the hub of social activity around which community life revolved” (140).

The Indian ancestors had the habit of sharing their food with strangers. This practice had been exposed to us through the incident where Raavana and Kumbhakarna were invited by Shochikesh. “You are most welcome to share our lunch, noble travellers, we may not be well-off, but we know our dharma. *Athithi devo bhava*. “(147) it means 'Any guest is like God'.

Once Vedavati and Raavana had a conversation about dharma in reference to the story of lion and the deer. Vedavati clearly states the pathway of dharma. “If you don't judge, you can open the space in your heart to help others. And that will take you towards dharma” (160). In another conversation she talks about the Karma or deed which is transactional in nature. She tells another important concept of our ancestors, *Swatatva*, *the essence of you*, more simply being. She tells that one can find his peace of mind in *Swatatva*. “Simply by Being what your meant to Be. By staying true to your *Swatatva*” (167).

Knowledge was highly prized in India. While describing the city of Kannauj, they share a joke by Kanyakubjas that "Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, was very kind towards them, while Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity and Wealth, was wont to ignore them altogether"(40). The main gates of Mithila had an image of Lady Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge, which had been carved into the top half of the gate, while there were couplets inscribed below the image.

A fool is worshiped in his home

A chief is worshipped in his village

A king is worshipped in his kingdom

A knowledgeable person is worshipped everywhere.(306)

Raavan and Kumbhakarna had a conversation about the Dharmic way of life. Kumbhakarna talks about the equality of women and respect for the fellow human being. “Our dharma says that a real man is one who respects women. A real man is one who respect himself and treat others with respect too” (301).

Culture relates Art, Music, Literature which also finds its place in *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*. Whenever Raavan had pain he would pour down his feelings through poems and paintings, Thus Raavan contributed to both art and literature. He wrote a poem “The Ballad of the Sun and the Earth”. He had invented an instrument and named it as Raavanahatha, 'hatha' in old Sanskrit, meant a man stricken with despair. Raavan was also an avid reader who was claimed that 'no individual had more manuscripts in his private collection than Raavan'(89). Kumbhakarna hailed the greatness of Raavan by saying. “You can play music, you sing, you write poetry, you are a warrior, you are wealthy, you are well-read, you are super intelligent”(93).

There is an inherent need to recover the spirit grounded in cultural mores that gradually disappears from the scene. Rejuvenation of the love for tradition is the need of the hour rather than swayed by the alien culture. Only, when we have the respect for something indigenous we can assimilate what is positive in other cultures.so we should get back to the roots to relish the ecstasy of ancientness and the bliss of oneness.

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