

Humanizing the Divine: Myth and Ethical Modernity in Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series

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Abstract

In modern Indian English fiction, there has been a re-embracing of mythological stories, especially in their reinterpretation in the light of the contemporary ethical, rational and socio-political issues. Amish Tripathi, Ram Chandra Series is one of the recent versions of myths, a notable intervention in that the retelling of the Ramayana is done within the paradigm of ethical humanism instead of divine absolutism. This article studies how Tripathi humanizes divinity through the demystification of the supernatural authority and the transfer of moral legitimacy in human agency, responsibility and reasonableness. Based on myth criticism, Indian ethical theory and theories of modernity, the analysis examines Tripathi as a representation of Ram as a disciplined ethical ruler whose power is created by moral deliberation and responsibility. The paper also examines the redefinition of the conventional meaning of dharma as an ethical duty in situations and effect-based and not a strict cosmic dictum. The Ram Chandra Series alters myth into an active field of moral investigation by preempting the ambiguity of ethics, rational choice and social responsibility in the modern society. The paper claims that the reinterpretation of Tripathi is a symptom of a larger cultural move towards ethical modernity where myth is seen not as a doctrine but as a structure through which moralized thinking takes place. The Ram Chandra Series, by morally displacing divinity into moral action, crossbreeds the ancient epic tradition and the contemporary humanistic values. The paper revisits that the series can be seen as an excellent illustration of the timelessness of myth in the era of secularism and pluralism and, in fact, illustrates how epic tales could be repurposed as a moral tool to retain their cultural relevance.

Keywords: Myth Reinterpretation, Ethical Humanism, Ramayana, Modernity, Amish Tripathi, Dharma.

1. Introduction

Myth has traditionally been a primitive form of cultural representation, which maintains the collective memory, moral codes and social values. In classical Indian epics like the Ramayana, discussions on mythology are closely interwoven with divinity, cosmic order and the concept of moral absolutism. The authority of the ethics in these books stems largely out of divine authority and moral action is also often depicted as a result of predetermined fate instead of the

one that is the result of human decisions (Eliade, 1963; Kirk, 1974). These representations strengthen a worldview where morality is fixed, transcendental and is mostly resistant to rational evaluation.

But it is the ability of the myth to be reinterpreted that is being more and more important in the contemporary society. Sacred absolutism seems to fail in the modern world which is characterized by secularism, democratic governance and ethical pluralism and rational inquiry. In turn, modern literature has started to reinterpret myth not as an established religious dogma but as a versatile system of narration which can undergo an ethical revival (Barthes, 1972; Segal, 2004).

Indian English fiction has contributed much to this process of reinterpretation. Epic stories are increasingly being reconsidered by modern authors to challenge traditional moral assumptions and also to explore the issues of the modern world like justice, leadership, gender and responsibility. These authors do not abdicate myth, instead, they make myth a place where morality can be questioned and the social problem can be evaluated. This change represents a transition to religious determinism and what can be termed ethical modernity in which the basis of moral authority is human agency and responsibility.

The Ram Chandra Series by Amish Tripathi is an example of such transformation. Tripathi questions devotional orthodoxy and divine absolutism by re telling the Ramayana in a rational and humanistic way. Ram is no longer shown as an infallible incarnation of Vishnu but as a responsible, morally striving and ethically trained human leader. Supernatural causation is met with low emphasis and ethical power is transferred in the rational judgment and institutional responsibility. The use of this narrative technique makes the epic consistent with contemporary sensibility to ethics and politics.

The paper will explore the manner in which the Ram Chandra Series realizes divinity and designates ethical modernity to define moral authority. It contends that Tripathi will not desacralize myth but will ethically revive it by shifting the sacred to moral action as opposed to the power of the supernatural. By examining the text rather closely, the paper addresses how divinity changes, how dharma is reinvented and how ethical humanism becomes a key organizing principle of the series. The paper, therefore, proves that even ancient mythological stories can be culturally relevant as well as interestingly involved with modern ethical discourses.

2. Review of Related Literature

Besides the classical myth theory and the Ramayana studies, the modern criticism has also put more focus on how myth plays a role in the present literary and cultural life. Roland Barthes (1972) theorizes myth as an ideological machine of naturalization implying that contemporary remakes of myth are bound to be ethnic and politically preoccupied with contemporary moral and political issues. This approach will find this view especially helpful in the context of realizing how contemporary retellings convert sacred stories into arenas of ideological contention, as opposed to a place of devotional affirmation.

The mythological re-tellings have become a major form of narrative, a way of the story to address the issues of identity, morality and power as a part of Indian English literature. As critics observe, such retellings tend to be reacting to the needs of current readerships in being

more rational, psychologically realistic and morally complex. According to Chandra, the modern Indian English fiction, contend that Chandra (2008) and Mukherjee (2000) argue, has been reclaiming the indigenous narrative traditions even as it critically revisits them. In this respect, myth, in this instance, serves as cultural legacy and resource of criticism.

The direct comparisons of the contemporary epic retellings also help to define the uniqueness of the way Amish Tripathi did it. Those that predict a feminist re-visioning are the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, which reclaims the voices of marginalized women by making them the narrative protagonists and *Asura* and *Ajaya* by the author Anand Neelakantan, which disrupts the idealization of heroes through the antagonists being the storytellers. The pipeline of these works is that it brings the moral absolutism into question through the revelation of the moral constraints of the canonical narratives. Nevertheless, it is usually in the elements of narrative inversion or ideological criticism that they dwell instead of ethical reconstruction.

The Ram Chandra Series by Tripathi is unlike these reinterpretations because of its consistent focus on moral humanism and institutional morality. Instead of giving precedence to one of the marginalized views, Tripathi reconstructs the moral structure of the whole epic. His stories are built on the concepts of law and rulership, responsibility and moral consideration, which are contemporary issues concerning justice and social responsibility. Critics like Dhar (2019) and Sharma (2018) observe that the rationalist approach of Tripathi demystifies the divine power, but still, the myth has an ethical gravity.

Although there has been an increasing interest in scholarly attention, the current criticism on the work of Tripathi is mainly descriptive in terms of narrative innovation, popularity or ideological orientation. It is relatively little involved with the philosophical implication of his redefinition of divinity and dharma. Specifically, the concept of the ethical transfer of divinity out of transcendental power to human agency has not been discussed adequately.

The current study will fill this gap and place the Ram Chandra Series in the larger discussions of myth and ethical modernity. It builds upon existing knowledge by showing that the reinterpretation by Tripathi is not simply the stylistic or ideological re-arrangement of the epic narrative, but a procedural reorganization of the epic narrative into ethical form. The increased literary background supports the main argument of the paper that modern mythological fiction serves as an essential place of ethical consideration in the modern literature.

3. Methodology and Critical Framework

In this research, the research methodology embraced is qualitative, interpretative, which is based on literature analysis. The close reading of the text with the help of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks is the main approach used in the paper since it does not rely on empirical data but works with mythological fiction. This discussion dwells on the nature of narrative techniques, characterization and the ethics discourse in the Amish Tripathi Ram Chandra Series that distributes divinity and the articulation of ethical modernity.

The critical structure of the work combines the myth criticism, the theory of modernity and the ethical philosophy. It is through myth criticism that the background to the analysis of the role of traditional epic narrative as the bearer of sacred authority and moral absolutism is developed.

Such scholars like Eliade (1963) and Malinowski (1954) define myth as sacred story, which justifies social and moral rules. Such views come in handy in drawing the classical structure of the Ramayana in which divinity functions as the agent of moral certitude. Meanwhile, the structural and symbolic approaches to myth, especially as formulated by Levi-Strauss (1963) and Ricoeur (1974), can be used to perceive myth as a system of meaning that is dynamic and can be reformulated as opposed to a set of theological doctrine.

The second significant aspect in the structure of the study is ethical philosophy. The paper discusses the relocation of moral authority between divine command and human responsibility by also drawing on the Indian ethical reasoning and the contemporary moral philosophy. Classical approaches to dharma have focused on duty, hierarchy and cosmic order (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Sharma, 2000) but the modern philosopher of ethics like Amartya Sen (2009) preempts accountability, justice and consequence. This ethical prism allows comparing traditional and modern moral paradigms and the ethical change is the core of the reinterpretation by Tripathi.

The third critical dimension is presented by the concept of ethical modernity. Modernity is perceived not only as a historical phase but also as an ethical state that is marked by rational query, pluralism of moralities and institutional responsibility (Habermas, 1984; Taylor, 1989). Using this paradigm, this paper evaluates how the Ram Chandra Series integrates mythological story with contemporary moral issues like leadership, governance and social responsibility. Ethical modernity enables the paper to go beyond the easy dichotomies of tradition against modernity and look at how myth is changing to fit the modern day moral situations.

In this analysis, the text of the study is being analyzed with respect to important episodes, character trajectories and moral issues in the four novels of the Ram Chandra Series. To avoid providing the reader with comprehensive plot descriptions, the paper will choose representative moments that show the effect of humanization of divinity, moral ambivalence and deliberation. Such selectivity approach guarantees depth of analysis and its relevance and coherence.

The methodology allows a subtle study of the narrative approach of Tripathi by incorporating myth criticism, ethical philosophy and the modernity theory. The paradigm of interdisciplinarity helps to maintain a solid standing of the study in terms of the literary analysis and enter wider philosophical and cultural discussions. This is especially appropriate to study the modern mythological fiction which functions at the level of tradition, ethics as well as contemporary thinking.

4. Myth and the Question of Divinity

This is because in classical versions of the Ramayana, divinity serves as the source of moral certainty. The moral power of Ram cannot be separated with his divine origin and the deities of Ram are justified by their divine origins as opposed to human philosophies. Classical retellings, such as those of Valmiki and later devotional versions such as the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas, give Ram as maryada purushottam, the perfect man whose behavior is a role model of correct action according to dharma. In this system, there is no moral ambiguity to a great extent because God will make sure ethical rightness is achieved.

Such portrayals strengthen a theological view of the world where morality is unquestionable and pre-destined. There is no decision making on ethical dilemmas but submission to the

cosmic order (rita). Acts of personal suffering or social injustice are justified through divine sanction as well and therefore are not subjected to moral critique but are sacrilegious. Pollock (1993) remarks that this merging of divinity and morality has always served to maintain political and social hierarchies by deterring moral objections.

This sacred determinism is enhanced by supernatural interventions. Heavenly weapons, Godly blessings, curses and magic rescues are used as a narrative device that reestablishes the divine control of human activities (Zimmer, 1972). Human agency is secondary to cosmic design, despite its existence. Although these components contribute to the devotional and symbolic strength of the epic, they also remove mythology and place it within the scope of contemporary morality that is based on the rationality of questioning and responsibility.

In the contemporary mythological reinterpretations, the challenge is on this paradigm, whereby the authority of divinity is questioned. Myth as a symbolic framework that can be reread to enable ethical reflexivity can be seen as a notion by Paul Ricoeur who feels that theology should yield to an ethical stance (Ricoeur, 1974). In this model, divinity is transformed into an ethical metaphor and not an external order, which allows moral agency to become a primary issue.

The Ram Chandra Series exists decisively in this contemporary interpretative field. Tripathi disrupts the classical discovery of divinity and moral infallibility of the god by denying the presence of overt supernatural interventionism and focusing on causality as a human choice. The divine decree has been phased out of resolving ethical dilemma to the human judgment, debate and consequence. Such a change places some ethical ambiguity in the story, causing myth to no longer be seen as a place of certainty but rather of moral investigation.

The query on divinity in the Ram Chandra Series is, therefore, an important deviation in the orthodoxy of the epics. Divinity is no longer the absolute principle of morality but it has been redefined by moral action. This change sets the stage of humanizing divine characters, which constitutes the main theme of the section that follows.

5. Humanizing the Divine in the Ram Chandra Series

One of the most striking characteristics of Amish Tripathi Ram Chandra Series is the conscious and calculated humanization of the divinity. As opposed to classical descriptions, which anticipate Ram was incarnated as a god, Tripathi recreates him as a human ruler, whose moral authority is developed by means of training, discipline and moral reflections instead of supernatural privilege (Tripathi, 2015, 2019). This is a drastic change in the role of myth making it no longer a divine revelation but a moral inquiry.

In Scion of Ikshvaku, Ram is not presented as a hero ordained by God but a strict prince who also imposes the same conditions on himself as others. His devotion to the law and justice is shown as a deliberate moral position and not a natural manifestation of divine will. Ram attains moral authority therefore by self restraint and accountability following the notion that ethical leadership is nurtured and not inherent. This description is quite consistent with the current ethical philosophy, which places most importance on moral agency, responsibility and deliberation rather than transcendence sanction (Matilal, 2002).

Tripathi also manages to make Ram more of a human being by preempting times of uncertainty, self-doubt and moral struggles. Governmental, penal and military decisions are shown as

ethical liabilities as opposed to the decisions made by God. The human cost of ethical leadership is demonstrated by the fact that Ram was ready to accept repercussions of his decisions. Leadership is no longer being romanticized as easy-going righteousness but introduced as an ongoing negotiation between competing claims of righteousness.

The war and violence in the story contribute to this ethical humanism further. Wars are not justified by God but by logic and interest in social stability. The lack of a miracle is a problem that puts the issue of ethical failure squarely in the hands of humans. This is unlike in the traditional epic narratives where divine approval frees rulers of any moral responsibility.

Notably, the anthropization of divinity in the Ram Chandra Series is not a factor which leads to desacralization. Divinity has not been denied but has been morally displaced. The holy is rediscovered as ethical practice itself- as today expressed in justice, responsibility and concern over the common good. This way divinity is not transcendent but immanent and achieved not by supernatural power but by moral behavior.

Tripathi bridges the ancient epic tradition to the modern thought ethics by humanizing divine characters. Ram comes out as a pattern of ethical leadership that can be applied to modern values of rationality and accountability. This change justifies the renewal of myth and it proves that, in an age of secularism, divinity, through the revitalization of an ethical humanist identity, can still possess an ethical power.

5.1 Ethical Leadership and Human Agency in Scion of Ikshvaku

Amish Tripathi presents Ram not as a priori deity but as a responsible human ruler whose moral authority is developed by training, restraint and responsibility in Scion of Ikshvaku (2015). Contrary to conventional epic texts, where divine incarnation grants Ram his righteousness, Ram in Tripathi has to actively work to gain moral credibility by action and judgment. This is because this narrative choice foreshadows human agency as the basis of ethical leadership.

The appointment of Ram as a governor and then a ruler is portrayed in an institutional structure that is controlled by the legislation and councils and administrative processes. The most notable characteristic of his leadership is his uncompromising devotion to the cause of justice even where his individual or family interests are involved. The most notable examples of modernity in the ethical context in the novel is the fact that Ram demands fairness in the application of the law. The way he did not want to spare himself or his family punishment is an expression of a rationalist understanding of justice as a matter of accountability but not of privilege (Tripathi, 2015).

Tripathi neither depicts Ram as morally certain nor does he depict him as having moral struggle. The moral choices are demonstrated to have repercussions and Ram is called upon a number of times to face the responsibility of choice. This description is also in line with contemporary ethical thinking that considers leadership to be a liability and moral risk rather than something that is divinely pre-ordained (Sen, 2009). Ethical principles tend to marginalize Ram both politically and emotionally and this fact supports the theory that ethical leadership comes at a price.

By eliminating the aspect of miracle in the situations of crisis, Tripathi makes sure that the success or failure of Ram is in the hands of people and their joint work. This is a narrative technique that personifies divinity and bases ethical action on rational planning, empathy and

responsibility. The divinity of Ram is therefore reconstructed as a moral virtue and not supernatural abilities.

5.2 Moral Deliberation and Female Ethical Agency in Sita: Warrior of Mithila

Sita: Warrior of Mithila (2017) continues to develop the ethical humanism of the Ram Chandra Series by preempting moral deliberation, using Sita as the character. Although the feminist reinterpretation by Sita is covered in more detail elsewhere, her contribution to the ethical decision-making is invaluable in terms of getting a broader picture about the ethical framework of this series. Tripathi does not introduce Sita as a passive upholder of virtue but as intellectually and ethically independent.

The war and state training Sita undergoes disputes the conventional gendered images of the legitimate ethical power. Her moral judgment and strategic thinking are based on rational thinking and not an emotional one. Similar to Ram, Sita is faced with ethical decisions that demand justice and compassion to balance. Her readiness to do things that are hard to accomplish highlights the fact that the series is ethically responsible rather than morally idealistic (Tripathi, 2017).

Notably, the ethical agency of Sita enhances the humanization of divinity since moral power is spread among various characters and not in one divine entity. The development of ethical wisdom is based on argument, contradiction and contemplation and this implies that ethics is a social construct and not ordained by God. This decentralization of ethical power is in line with the contemporary democratic and ethical thinking.

The conflict between the desire and the ethical duty is also evident through the role Sita plays in the decision-making process. Her acts explain that ethical modernity is based on bargaining conflicting duties instead of playing pre-determined roles. Tripathi shows a broader definition of ethical humanism through Sita, as the version of ethical leadership is not limited to male leadership and this is in keeping with the vision of rational, all-encompassing moral principles upheld in the series.

5.3 Ethical Conflict, War and Responsibility in Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta and War of Lanka

The later books of the series, Ravan: Enemy of Aryavanta (2018) and War of Lanka (2019), add another complex to the ethical situation, thanks to ambiguity of morality and conflicting views. In Raavan, Tripathi interferes with binary moralization, humanizing the villain and preempting the social and psychological circumstances that define the failure of the ethical. Raavan is not depicted as a human who is evil but a victim of the social exclusion, injustice and moral negligence.

This moral quandary contravenes the historic epic moral absolutism and reinforces the ethical investigation impetus the series had. Ethical responsibility is spread throughout the social patterns and not placed on personal evil. This depiction is consistent with the contemporary ethical theory, which is focused on the responsibility of the system and the agency of the individuals (Ricoeur, 1974).

The morality of war and violence is also challenged in the war of Lanka. Military war is not presented as the will of God but as a sad consequence of moral decline and political collapse.

Leaders have to defend violence by elucidating it using rational arguments based on necessity and not God (Tripathi, 2019). This lack of the miraculous resolution stresses the human price to ethical failure and supports the sense of accountability.

By these stories, Tripathi changes the historic war into an ethical issue instead of a heroic show. Ethics does not represent winning but doing what is right, being restrained and conscious of consequence. Myth therefore becomes a platform of investigating contemporary ethical questions of power, violence and justice.

6. Reinterpreting Dharma as Ethical Responsibility

Dharma in classical Indian philosophical and epic traditions is strongly associated with divine order, ritual duty and social rank. Based on the theory of rita, dharma is a code of norms that stipulates the obligations according to caste, gender and social status (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Sharma, 2000). The moral act in this context is mostly role oriented with focus being laid on obedience to the inherited obligation but not moral judgement. This kind of understanding strengthens moral rigidity and restricts ethical agency of the individual.

The Ram Chandra Series by Amish Tripathi greatly breaks this general formulation by re-defining dharma to be a situational and reflective ethical duty. Instead of presenting dharma as a set of rules, Tripathi describes it as a principle, which has to be judged concerning consequence, justice and overall good (Tripathi, 2017). The choices that Ram made are influenced by logical evaluation and moral judgment based on the rational consideration instead of sticking to the rules and customs, which corresponds to dharma and the contemporary approach to ethics.

Such reinterpretation brings moral ambiguity to the story. Cases are presented whereby upholding of the traditional duty clashes with compassion, justice, or social order. At such times, Tripathi favors ethical performance to ritual rectitude implying that moral responsibility is more important than procedural fidelity. This change echoes the modern ethical thinking that emphasizes responsibility and societal value rather than unquestionable moral principles (Dhand, 2002; Sen, 2009).

The redefinition of dharma as a commandment of the gods instead of moral accountability also redistributes the authority of morality. Cosmic order or divine decree is no longer the responsible side but rather human actors who have to suffer the aftermath of their decisions. The human aspect of moral life is strengthened since it creates the possibility of ethical failure and uncertainty of moral success.

The Ram Chandra Series bridges the gap between classical Indian thought and modern moral philosophy by re-conceiving the concept of dharma as an ethical principle as opposed to ritual duty. Dharma loses its dogmatic rigidity and retains its ethical seriousness, thus myth is allowed to serve as a dynamic moral dialogue relevant to the contemporary pluralistic societies.

7. Myth and Ethical Modernity

The Ram Chandra Series squarely places myth in the context of ethical modernity through the humanization of divinity and reconstructs the dharma. The importance of ethical legitimacy in the story is not the transcendental authority but the rational judgment and the accountability

and the consideration to the collective welfare. The change is an indicator of present-day intellectual trends via secularism, moral pluralism and institutionalism in governance (Taylor, 1989; Giddens, 1991).

The myth in the reinterpretation by Tripathi is a critical medium in which the issue of modern ethics regulation is discussed; why questions about justice, leadership and responsibility are raised. Governance is also described as an ethical process that needs transparency and accountability and not divine approval. The ethical competence of the leaders and the desire to take the consequences allow evaluating them, which makes the story related to the modern principles of democracy and ethics. Myth thereby is the realm of communal-ethical contemplation instead of divine confirmation.

Notably, ethical modernity in the Ram Chandra Series has no implication of denying the tradition. Tradition rather is put to ethical inquiry. Such cultural values are preserved to the extent that they lead to justice and harmony in society and those practices that keep supporting injustice or exclusion are doubted. This selective act of engagement allows myth to serve as a continuation of culture and moral commentary at the same time.

Tripathi illustrates the adaptive ability of myth in a rational age by inserting ethical modernity in mythological narrative. Modernity does not make ancient epics irrelevant; on the contrary, they obtain a different meaning once transformed through ethical humanism. Myth is therefore an important literary genre that can also be used in solving modern moral issues without losing the cultural context.

8. Conclusion

The present paper has shown that the Amish Tripathi Ram Chandra Series series is an important ethical redefinition of the myth as it humanizes divinity consciously and redefines the moral authority. Trying to reduce supernatural absolutism and to foreground human agency, Tripathi turns the Ramayana into a system of ethical reflection based on the notions of responsibility, rationality and accountability.

The discussion has indicated that divinity within the Ram Chandra Series has not been disapproved but has been morally displaced. The moral power of Ram is not a result of some divine favor but the outcome of restrained ethical behavior, which makes the epic story close to contemporary ideas about the leadership and justice. The redefinition of dharma as a situational ethical duty and not a strict cosmic decree, likewise, a source of moral ambiguity and judgment in the story, strengthens the humanness of ethical living.

By placing myth in ethical modernity, Tripathi helps ancient tales to find relevance in the modern issues of governance, justice and moral responsibility. The series is therefore illustrative of the adaptive power of myth and shows that cultural continuity and ethical critique do not necessarily go hand in hand.

This paper also adds to the current debates on mythological fiction by emphasizing the importance of ethical humanism as one of the key principles of modern myth reinterpretation. It postulates that myth is still applicable in a rational and pluralistic era because of its ability to renew ethics. Subsequent studies can build upon this analysis by comparing the ethical framework used by Tripathi to other modern versions of the Indian epics or analyzing the reception of modern mythological versions by the reader.

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