



Myth in a Modern Socio-Political Context: Governance, Justice and Power in Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian English fiction has increasingly revisited mythological narratives to engage with modern socio-political concerns such as governance, justice, power and ethical leadership. Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series represents a significant reinterpretation of the Ramayana that situates myth within a rational, institutional and politically conscious framework. This paper examines how Tripathi reconfigures epic mythology to reflect modern principles of governance, rule of law and moral accountability. Through a close textual analysis of political structures, legal practices and ethical conflicts depicted in the series, the study argues that Tripathi desacralizes political authority and relocates legitimacy from divine mandate to institutional responsibility. Kings are portrayed as accountable administrators rather than divinely sanctioned rulers, justice is framed as procedural and ethical rather than cosmic and warfare is presented as a morally burdensome consequence of political failure rather than heroic destiny. Power, in this reinterpretation, is consistently subjected to ethical scrutiny and collective responsibility. By aligning myth with modern political thought, the Ram Chandra Series transforms the Ramayana into a narrative of socio-political ethics rather than sacred absolutism. The paper concludes that Tripathi's reinterpretation demonstrates the continuing relevance of myth as a critical medium for examining governance, justice and power in contemporary Indian English literature.

Keywords: Myth and Politics; Governance, Justice and Power, Rule of Law, Ethical Leadership, Ramayana Retellings, Indian English Literature, Amish Tripathi

1. Introduction

Myth has historically served as a foundational narrative form through which societies legitimize political authority, moral order and social hierarchy. In ancient civilizations, myth functioned not merely as storytelling but as a mechanism of governance, shaping collective consciousness and prescribing ethical norms. In the Indian tradition, the Ramayana occupies a central position in this process, presenting kingship, justice and social order as divinely sanctioned realities rather than human constructions. Political authority in such narratives is frequently portrayed as sacred, absolute and immune to ethical scrutiny (Eliade, 1963; Pollock, 1993).

However, modern socio-political thought has fundamentally altered the understanding of power and governance. Authority is no longer justified through divine mandate but through legal frameworks, institutional accountability and ethical responsibility. Justice is evaluated in



terms of fairness, due process and human consequences rather than cosmic balance. As societies transition from sacred monarchy to democratic and constitutional systems, literature has become a crucial space for negotiating this ideological shift.

Contemporary Indian English fiction has actively participated in this transformation by revisiting mythological narratives through modern political and ethical lenses. Rather than rejecting myth outright, modern writers reinterpret it to reflect contemporary concerns such as governance, justice, power and moral accountability. Myth thus becomes a dialogic space where tradition and modernity intersect.

Within this literary movement, Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series represents a significant reimagining of the Ramayana in a modern socio-political context. Tripathi reconstructs epic mythology as a rational, institutional and ethically conscious narrative. Kings are depicted as administrators bound by law, justice is procedural rather than divine and warfare is framed as a moral dilemma rather than a sacred duty. Power is consistently subjected to ethical scrutiny rather than unquestioned reverence.

This paper examines how the Ram Chandra Series situates myth within a modern socio-political framework by reinterpreting governance, justice and power. It argues that Tripathi transforms myth from a tool of sacred legitimization into a narrative of political ethics and institutional responsibility. Through close textual analysis and engagement with political philosophy and myth criticism, the study demonstrates how modern mythological fiction can function as a medium for socio-political reflection in contemporary Indian English literature.

2. Myth, Politics and the Question of Power

Myth has long functioned as a cultural instrument for articulating and legitimizing political power. As Barthes (1972) argues, myth operates as a form of discourse that transforms historically contingent power relations into naturalized and unquestionable truths. In epic traditions, political authority is often embedded within sacred cosmology, making power appear divinely ordained rather than socially constructed.

In the Ramayana, kingship is closely aligned with cosmic order (rita), where the ruler's authority mirrors divine will. This fusion of sacred and political power reinforces moral absolutism and discourages dissent. Pollock (1993) notes that epic narratives serve as political imaginaries that naturalize hierarchy and authority by situating them within mythic structures. Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series challenges this paradigm by desacralizing political authority. Power is presented as human, contingent and ethically constrained rather than absolute. Leaders are not revered as divine embodiments but evaluated as moral agents accountable for their decisions. This shift reflects Weber's concept of rational-legal authority, where legitimacy arises from institutional systems rather than tradition or charisma (Weber, 1978).

By reframing myth as a space of political inquiry, Tripathi transforms epic narrative into a critical engagement with power. Authority becomes a subject of ethical evaluation rather than sacred reverence, aligning myth with modern political consciousness.

3. Governance and Rule of Law in the Ram Chandra Series

Governance in the Ram Chandra Series is presented not as a function of divine right but as an



institutional responsibility grounded in law, procedure and ethical accountability. Unlike classical epic narratives where kingship is legitimized through sacred lineage or cosmic sanction, Tripathi portrays governance as a rational system that demands discipline, consultation and moral restraint from those in power.

Ram's leadership is consistently defined by his adherence to the rule of law. Legal principles apply uniformly to citizens and rulers alike, reinforcing the idea that authority is constrained by justice rather than personal will (Tripathi, 2015). This commitment to legal equality often places Ram in conflict with public opinion and political expediency, highlighting the ethical burden of principled governance. Such portrayal resonates with modern political philosophy, particularly Rawls's conception of justice as fairness, where laws must be impartial and universally applicable (Rawls, 1971).

The presence of administrative councils and deliberative institutions further emphasizes Tripathi's rationalized vision of governance. Political decisions are rarely unilateral; instead, they emerge through dialogue, consultation and ethical debate. This institutional framework reflects Weber's model of rational-legal authority, in which legitimacy arises from procedural systems rather than charisma or tradition (Weber, 1978). Kings are administrators accountable to law, not divine monarchs immune to scrutiny.

By embedding governance within institutional structures, Tripathi reimagines epic kingship as ethical administration. Myth thus becomes a narrative through which modern principles of constitutional governance and rule of law are explored, making the Ram Chandra Series relevant to contemporary political discourse.

4. Justice, Punishment and Ethical Accountability

Justice in the Ram Chandra Series is portrayed as a moral and institutional process rather than an act of divine retribution. Traditional epic justice often relies on cosmic balance, where wrongdoing is corrected through supernatural intervention or fate. Tripathi departs from this model by grounding justice in ethical reasoning, proportionality and social consequence.

Punishment in the series is never arbitrary. Leaders are required to justify their decisions through rational deliberation and legal procedure. Ram's insistence on enforcing law even when it causes personal loss underscores the ethical cost of justice. Justice is thus presented as a burden rather than a privilege of power. This approach aligns closely with modern theories of justice that emphasize due process, fairness and accountability (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 2009).

The series also echoes Michel Foucault's critique of punitive power. Justice is not exercised through spectacle, terror, or excessive force but through institutional legitimacy and moral justification (Foucault, 1977). Punishment aims at correction and social order rather than vengeance. This rejection of arbitrary punishment reflects modern legal sensibilities and reinforces the ethical dimension of governance.

By embedding justice within human institutions and ethical judgment, Tripathi transforms myth into a discourse on accountability. Authority is legitimized not by power itself but by the moral reasoning that governs its exercise.

5. War, Violence and Moral Responsibility



In classical epic traditions, war is often framed as divinely sanctioned destiny, absolving leaders of moral responsibility. The Ram Chandra Series radically reconfigures this paradigm by portraying war as a tragic outcome of political failure rather than heroic inevitability. Violence is never presented as sacred or glorious; instead, it is depicted as ethically burdensome and morally complex.

Tripathi foregrounds the human cost of war, emphasizing suffering, displacement and loss. Leaders are compelled to justify violence through necessity and proportionality rather than divine command. This portrayal aligns with just war theory, which evaluates conflict through ethical criteria such as legitimacy, necessity and responsibility (Walzer, 1977).

The narrative also resonates with Clausewitz's conception of war as a political act shaped by human decisions rather than metaphysical destiny (Clausewitz, 1976). Warfare in the Ram Chandra Series emerges from failed diplomacy, ethical compromise and political miscalculation. Leaders are held morally accountable for the consequences of violence, reinforcing the series' commitment to ethical realism.

By refusing to glorify war, Tripathi situates myth within modern debates on violence and political responsibility. War becomes a moral problem demanding reflection rather than celebration.

6. Individual Authority versus Institutional Power

A central socio-political tension in the Ram Chandra Series lies between individual authority and institutional power. While leaders possess agency and decision-making capacity, their authority is consistently constrained by legal frameworks, ethical norms and institutional accountability. Personal charisma or heroic status does not override systemic responsibility.

Tripathi privileges institutions over individuals, reflecting Hannah Arendt's distinction between power as collective action and authority as personal domination (Arendt, 1958). Kings are portrayed not as absolute rulers but as custodians of institutional trust. Their legitimacy depends on adherence to law and ethical principles rather than lineage or valor.

This emphasis on institutional power functions as a critique of authoritarianism. By subjecting individual authority to legal and ethical scrutiny, the series reinforces democratic values of shared responsibility and accountability. Power is represented as a collective trust rather than a personal entitlement.

Through this framework, Tripathi aligns myth with modern political ethics, transforming epic leadership into a model of responsible governance.

7. Myth and Modern Political Thought

The Ram Chandra Series demonstrates that myth can function as a powerful medium for articulating modern political thought rather than merely preserving pre-modern belief systems. Traditionally, myth has been associated with sacred authority, cultural continuity and moral absolutism. However, contemporary reinterpretations increasingly reveal myth's capacity for ideological renewal and ethical critique. Tripathi's narrative exemplifies this transformation by aligning epic storytelling with principles central to modern political philosophy.

One of the defining features of modern political thought is the emphasis on rational



deliberation, institutional legitimacy and ethical accountability. Thinkers such as Habermas (1984) argue that legitimate authority emerges from communicative rationality, dialogue and consensus rather than coercion or transcendental justification. The Ram Chandra Series reflects this framework by foregrounding consultation, debate and ethical reasoning in political decision-making. Leaders rarely act unilaterally; instead, governance unfolds through councils, discussions and moral negotiation.

Furthermore, Tripathi's reinterpretation of power resonates with modern critiques of absolutism. Power in the series is consistently problematized rather than celebrated. Political authority is portrayed as conditional and revocable, dependent on adherence to justice and law. This representation aligns with Weber's conception of rational-legal authority, where legitimacy arises from institutional systems rather than tradition or charisma (Weber, 1978). Myth thus becomes a narrative vehicle for examining the foundations of political legitimacy. The series also engages implicitly with modern debates on secularism and ethics. By minimizing divine intervention and emphasizing human responsibility, Tripathi relocates moral authority from the metaphysical realm to human institutions. Ethical judgment becomes a product of reason, empathy and accountability rather than divine command. This shift reflects the broader modern transition from sacred to secular frameworks of governance, while still retaining mythic symbolism and cultural resonance.

Importantly, Tripathi does not reject myth as irrelevant to modern political life. Instead, he demonstrates that myth can be ethically renewed to address contemporary concerns. By reimagining epic narratives through rational governance, legal equality and moral responsibility, the Ram Chandra Series affirms myth's adaptability and continued relevance. Myth becomes not a relic of the past but a living discourse capable of engaging with modern political imagination.

Through this synthesis of myth and modern political thought, Tripathi positions epic fiction as a site of ideological reflection and critique. The Ram Chandra Series thus exemplifies how mythological narratives can contribute meaningfully to contemporary discussions on power, justice and governance within Indian English literature.

8. Conclusion

This study has examined how Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series reconfigures myth within a modern socio-political framework by redefining governance, justice, power and ethical responsibility. Departing from traditional epic representations that sanctify political authority through divine mandate, Tripathi reconstructs the Ramayana as a narrative grounded in institutional accountability, rational deliberation and moral agency.

The analysis has demonstrated that governance in the series operates through rule of law, consultative institutions and ethical restraint rather than absolute kingship. Justice is presented as a human responsibility governed by proportionality, fairness and accountability, while punishment and power are subjected to moral scrutiny. War and violence are framed not as sacred destiny but as ethical failures that demand justification and reflection. Through these narrative strategies, Tripathi aligns myth with modern political philosophy and ethical realism. By emphasizing institutional power over individual dominance, the Ram Chandra Series



critiques authoritarianism and reinforces democratic values of shared responsibility and collective decision-making. Power is depicted as a trust rather than an entitlement, contingent upon ethical conduct and legal legitimacy. This reconfiguration challenges the moral absolutism traditionally associated with epic narratives and affirms the relevance of myth in a rational, modern socio-political context.

The Ram Chandra Series thus demonstrates that mythological fiction can function as a dynamic space for political thought rather than mere cultural preservation. By transforming sacred narrative into ethical inquiry, Tripathi contributes significantly to contemporary Indian English literature and socio-political discourse. The study affirms that myth, when critically reinterpreted, remains a potent medium for examining governance, justice and power in the modern world.

Future research may extend this analysis by comparing Tripathi's political vision with other modern retellings of Indian epics or by exploring reader reception of mythological fiction as a form of political commentary. Such inquiries would further illuminate the evolving role of myth in contemporary cultural and political imagination.

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