

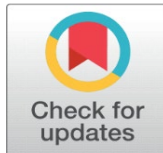
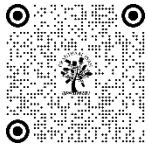
BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY: WOMEN'S AGENCY IN DEVDUTT PATTANAIAK'S STORYTELLING

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ABSTRACT

The Works of Devdutt Pattanaik have been read against the grain, so to say; the discourses that powerfully counter indicate the representation of women and their prominent position in society. Authors Indira Purohit and Dr. Suresh Sharma have critically analyzed the uniqueness of this perspective in the Indian literature of Pattanaik in his presentation of the portrayal of the strength and importance of women. Based on the new reading of his novels, the essay offers innovative readings and contrary interpretations to discuss, challenge, and reassess the traditional narratives attached to female characters. The women, as depicted in Pattanaik's fiction, are apt to provide the essential life-giving quality, since smart men will be able to have meaningful relations with them, so such findings of study draw attention to the depth of women's relationships at the societal and natural levels.

Keywords: Devdutt Pattanaik, Indian Literature, Women's Representation, Counter-Discursive Readings, Literary Analysis, Female Strength, Societal Roles

1. INTRODUCTION

K Varsha and Parvathy N (2017) argues that one of the stories told in the Mahabharata is about a childless king named Yuvanashva who accidentally takes amystical potion designed to get his women pregnant and gives birth to a child. Devdutt Pattanaik, a mycologist, retells the tale in his fictional book *The Pregnant King*, which explores the fuzziness of gender norms. Yuvanashva's decision of whether to behave as his child's mother or father consumes his whole life. While his emotions tells him that he is the mother of his child, the Dharma laws command him to act like a father and king. Ironically, the monarch yearned until his dying breath to be addressed as "mother" by his son while trying to be the epitome of masculinity and a champion of the Dharma.

The paper elaborates on Yuvanashva's identity dilemma as she becomes confused and stuck in the murky spaces between motherhood and paternity. Varga, Hilda-Hedvig (2017) claims that Devdutt Pattanaik provides the reader with interesting mythical events from the intriguing country of India in his book, which has the evocative title *Culture. 50 Insights from Mythology*. These are weaved together with modern allusions from film, politics, philosophy, and psychology, to mention a few. His own experiences make the profane a more accessible source of knowledge, while also

providing a compelling starting point for the expert to consider and come to his own conclusions (which may or may not be the same as the author's).

Even though some themes are repeated, the fresh context they are placed in or the unique point of view that is adopted each time enhances the beauty of the finished product and spares the reader from a tedious, if not irksome, experience. The range of themes and concepts covered is wide enough to appeal to every taste and mindset. The author advises the reader to reflect on important ideas like reincarnation, karma, maya, kala, detachment, and many more in order to better understand the Indian perspective on culture, mythology, and ultimately life. The reader is given an insightful journey into the depths of a uniquely flavoured history while never losing touch with the present. As we adoringly like to say about India, past and present always coexist at any given time, which may help to explain the fascination born for this millennial culture.

Karthika P and Dr. Betsy Paul C (2020) assert that in Indian English literature, there haven't been many legendary works that address the subject of homosexuality. In his works, Devdutt Pattanaik raises this subject and makes the argument that homosexuality was not as frowned upon in ancient society as it is now. However, the modern era has seen a movement toward mainstreaming different marginal groups. The study examines the effectiveness of Pattanaik's marketing plan in light of the social inclusion trend. *Shikhandi and other Tales they Won't Tell You* is the title of Pattanaik's short story collection that contains the same stories in a shorter version. Iravan who married Krishna crossdressed as Mohini, Lord Vishnu who crossdressed as Mohini and gave birth to Lord Ayyappa from Lord Shiva, and nearly all other stories on gender fluidity and queer sexuality mentioned in the text include the tales of Shikhandi who transformed into a man to complete the marriage with her wife, King Bhagiratha who was born out of the love of two women who were the widows of a late king, King Yu Only two of the stories—those of Bhagiratha and Chudala, a woman who changed into a man to teach her husband because he wouldn't be a teacher to a woman—are not recounted in the previous book. The market demand for the tales at the time is shown by the fact that the same author reprinted the same stories in a different format. A collection of queer stories from Indian mythology and a gay author's economic success and popularity are proof that the marginal is marketable in the current sociopolitical climate.

Sruthy, Shaji and Devi. K. claim that men are expected to be "tough" or to not weep. Women shouldn't behave or dress like boys. People behave as if they are men or women, and anything that deviates from this is seen as unmasculine or unfeminine. In uncompromising commitment to the heteronormative standards, one's incapacity to uphold the relative gender position is correctly spurned and certainly muted. The researchers have examined how heteronormative rules suppress transgender voices, pushing them to the periphery and expertly destroying those who don't fit the mold. The researchers have also discussed how the phrase "sexual orientation" is misunderstood in society. It also explores the function of "Truth's" power, which may be seen as an organized technique that develops, disperses, controls, and flows. The art of Devdutt Pattanaik crosses the lines dividing what is considered male and female, masculine and feminine, preserving the nuance of notions like gender and sexuality. Yuvanashva's name of the crown king Mandhata, which translates to "he who was nursed by me," (Pattanaik 205), reveals the true motivations driving his transgression of and re- construction of the gender standards that he formerly upheld. Here, maternal traits are associated rather than paternal ones, expressing Yuvanashva's non-heteronormative life. The legendary past assumes unique forms thanks to the postcolonial Indian English author. The writer retells history, but from a unique perspective that destroys authority, stereotypes, idols, and sexist ideals. Retellings provide the underprivileged in today's society an opportunity to be heard. People in this generation have a limited comprehension of dominant concepts of gender because of their complex connotations.

Even while progress has been made toward equal rights, the struggles faced by LGBTQI people differ greatly across nations and cultures. Homosexual marriage is still only legal in a small number of countries, and in others, even being in a homosexual relationship is a crime. Culture is not constant; it evolves gradually in response to several internal and external variables. Only through true engagement and collaboration between the mainstream and the marginalized could freedom be attained. Male or female, gay or straight—a person's identity is not just shaped by their gender and sexual orientation.

Seema Devi and Dr. Sarla Singla (2020) claim that India is known as the "land of knowledge" and is home to a vast cultural legacy. As the most creative human invention, literature has the duty to transmit to the following generation facts, mythology, and imagination mixed together. The creation of myths began with oral tradition and ended with archetypal research. In essence, myth is a rich and vibrant cultural resource that people are actively reengaging with. This renowned group of mythical authors, including Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattanaik, Ashwin Sanghi, Ashok K. Banker,

and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, is marching with the rock-solid scholarship and compelling writing style necessary to dispel the prevailing beliefs. They are clearing the web of Indian cultural myths and practices. Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi skillfully deconstruct symbols associated with Shiva, a mysterious deity, to reveal His true nature. With reference to its regional variation, many Shiva myths are clarified and explained. In an indigenous manner, the myths of Shiva as told by Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathi are attempted to be debunked in the current work. Shiva's character is explained, including the blue throat, trident, third eye, aum, ganas, halahal, and snow-covered mountain that surrounds him. Shiva stories are being investigated from a fresh angle in this age of de- and re-mythologizing. Shiva emerged in Amish culture as a cool-hot guy and in Devdutt as a great philosopher of life. The mask of myth from the Nagamandala period to the Shiva Trilogy has seen a significant transformation because to modern trends like guide-by-slide, sage-on-stage, and digital humanities.

Tripathi, Sneha and Dr. Tejal Jani (2020) assert that Devdutt Pattanaik, a renowned Indian mythologist, offers several types of retellings and interpretations of myth and mythology in his works. He has extensive knowledge of Indian myths and can provide insight into the many ways that Indian mythological stories and Indian culture are seen and analyzed. He provides a rational explanation of all facets of Indian culture, including the Gods and Goddesses. His comprehension of the topic is still fragmentary. Myths were part of society through oral tradition even before writing became a viable form of communication. It influenced the religious, cultural, philosophical, literary, artistic, traditional, and customary foundations of civilisation.

Myths of a civilisation are legends that serve to shape and organize that civilization's culture. Therefore, studying a religion's myths, scriptures, epics, and holy books will provide a thorough understanding of its tenets and social structure. Although Devdutt sometimes comes across as sanctimonious, the delicate subjects he discusses make him appear like an all-knowing author. Many mythical character-related whys and hows that have remained unexplained up to this point are addressed in his books. Even now, one can still see many representations of legendary figures in human nature, such as those who are constrained by their own moral standards, like Ram, and a lot of strong, independent women who trust their instincts. Because of the choices he takes when faced with moral quandaries, the character of Ram may seem to be quite convoluted in actuality. Devdutt investigates the enigmatic essence of people by reinterpreting narratives from cherished classics and folklore. He defines and explains the origins of customs and taboo behaviors that persist in India today. When Gods and Goddesses are shown as mortal men and women in India, they are both feared and revered in their many personas.

Boral, Savita and Dr. Divyabha Vashisth argue that a highly active discipline, queer research is growing nearly daily to encompass new histories, new intimate and familial cultures, and new ways of being queer. At the start of the 1990s, when there was a movement from Gay and Lesbian studies to Queer studies, the recovery of the "Queer Theory" occurred practically simultaneously in the United States. Even said, the world is evolving throughout time in terms of intelligence, science, and technology, and it is becoming more accepting to advances. Ironical, but true, that some individuals still have a denial-based attitude toward the LGBT people. The formation of sexualities

and sexual appetites is where the LGBT concept leans most heavily. It is crucial to go back to the earlier age of ancient tales and legends in order to maintain the idea of a more accepting India. Comparatively understanding the gay space then and today will be helpful. According to 'puranic' Hindu literature like the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Kamasutra, etc., society was more liberal than it is now before the Anno Domini.

Shikhandi and other Queer Tales they Don't Tell You by Devdutt Pattanaik, which in a sense informs us about many more secret queer tales from our own most ancient literature, has been chosen to investigate this topic further. Dr. Raji Ramesh (2021) asserts that the old Hindu holy knowledge has helped the culture advance significantly. Readers and civilizations both grew greatly as a result of these teachings. The literary canon of India is very diverse. It is a compilation of research in many Indian languages, including Bengali, Gujarati, Odia, Malayalam, Urdu, and Sanskrit. In one way or another, all of these books somehow examine both aspects of a region's decorum. Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik is a mythologist, writer, speaker, illustrator, and expert in bringing the relevance of mythology and history to contemporary life. He uses these old, spiritual teachings as a mirror of society.

Mythology explains many theological concerns and distinguishes between what is good and bad, it is crucial to humanity. Any mythology often depicts the travels and challenges of a morally upright protagonist. He also encounters the conditions and results of both good and bad activities and gains a wealth of moral lessons that, in the end, aid in the fight of evil both inside and in society. In the end, he defends what is morally correct, or "Dharma," as it is called in Hindu mythology. It is said that the "Manavas," the descendants of "Manu," follow Dharma, which is based on obligations and

functions. Every living thing in our planet has a certain function. This obligation gives rise to wants and makes room for even the weakest to exist and develop. He exposes the worlds of Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu, and other gods to the spectators. He reinterprets narratives from well-known folktales and classic literature and learns about the enigmatic character of people. He explains and illustrates the main reason why taboo behaviors and Indian customs still exist today. Even though they are regarded as mortal creatures, Indians honor the persona of the lords and goddesses. Retelling tales is a common folkloric activity in India. Basically, it involves giving a fresh version of a narrative in a unique way. It often updates and changes how people see mythology.

In essence, Pattanaik retells the stories from fabled Indian epics while introducing underrepresented viewpoints and personalities. He delves deeply into the society and culture of India by analyzing, contrasting, comparing, and criticizing those personalities. In the writings of Devdutt Pattanaik, the researcher has attempted to draw comparisons between the past and the present. He distributes quiet voices over huge mythological tales. The study explores the many ways that the most well-known Indian mythologist has interpreted and retold myths. He has knowledge of how to convey holy lore and mythology in a delicate and captivating manner. He teaches the reasoning behind each aspect of Indian culture and the Gods and Goddesses. He is knowledgeable about the topic from many angles.

Dr. Saumi Mary M (2021) claims that *The Pregnant King* by Devdutt Pattanaik has been examined in her study as an alternative discourse. The study rereads the book to find the gender stereotyping and sexual discrimination that have been instilled into it while analyzing the narrative structure of the text and character delineation. The current analysis highlights the author's discriminatory approach to the issue of gender construction, subverting the peripheral interpretation of the text as an erasure of gender constructions. Further the researcher argues that through a variety of people, the book also examines transgender identity concerns. The story of various characters, including Shilavati, an intelligent and ambitious princess who is unable to succeed her father as king, is explored in the book. Youngly widowed, she takes on the role of regent, which bothers the Brahmin elders who are not used to having a leader who breastfeeds a child while debating dharmic issues. It's interesting to note that Shilavati's unorthodox life later on doesn't make her more understanding of her son's predicament, which emphasizes the idea that non-conformity and anti-tradition may take many different forms and that they aren't necessarily compatible. Additionally, it relates the story of Somvat and Sumedha, two male boyhood pals who choose to wed despite being heterosexual. A yaksha named Sthunakarna gives up his masculinity to marry Shikhandi, then reclaims it to wed Somvat. After being castrated by a nymph, Arjuna, the legendary warrior with several wives, was compelled to assume the identity of a eunuch. Yaja and Upayaja both revered Adi-natha, the teacher of teachers, as a recluse and an enchantress, respectively. It also tells the tale of Ileshwar Mahadev, the patron deity of Vallabhi, who transforms into a deity on full moon days and a goddess on new moon nights. Thus, the work might be seen as a play on such divisive topics as gender and sexuality.

The article provides several counter discursive readings that aid in analyzing the text from a variety of perspectives. It provides readers with fresh readings and opposing viewpoints to consider. Purohit, Indira and Dr. Suresh Sharma claim that Devdutt Pattanaik is a writer from a different realm. He emphasizes the strength of women and their contribution to a stronger society by taking a fresh perspective on Indian literature and presenting it from a different aspect. They have reviewed Devdutt's novels in their paper. The study also emphasizes how women are depicted in his works. All female structures in nature are important because they all create new life. Only the most sensible or intelligent guy obtains the chance to conceive women. The female may either make a lifelong relationship with one man or she can only meet him during mating season.

However, the male typically has to compete with other men for her attention by putting himself in danger when he engages in combat with them or displays his tones or plumage in plain view of hunters. However, among individuals, there has been an effort to subvert this natural rule, which is seen in the different kinds of marriage described in the puranas. Prajapati-vivah, in which the youngster approaches the girl's father to ask for her hand in marriage. Brahma-vivah, in which the young lady's father approaches the boy and asks for his hand in marriage while also promising endowment. Deva-vivah, in which the woman is offered to the male as payment for services rendered to the father. For the purpose of enabling the sage to do yagna, a girl is given to a rishi together with a bullock (a burden animal) and a cow (a source of sustenance). Gandharva-vivah, or a union based only on a person's love for another person and their ability to function independently of society. Asura-vivah, the place where the young woman is purchased. Rakshasa-vivah where the young woman is wearing a stole and the young woman gets attacked when she is asleep in Pisacha-vivah. Devdutt Pattanaik, a writer, honors women for their contributions to society's improvement through their creative endeavors. He considers women to be experts in a variety of fields, including homemaking, politics, leadership, and more.

2. CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn is that Devdutt Pattanaik's work brings forth a transformative lens to see the female in texts. Women were not presented as passive but as an integral force in the life story and then in the process of society makes the works challenge very simplistic, conventional perspectives. It changes the discourse of gender roles in a literary study, and readers are invited to reflect on the general implications of female empowerment and agency that can find resonance in broader circles of discourse.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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