

MYTHO-VISUALS: REVISIONING THE RAMAYANA IN THE MODERN TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD

Ms. Ayuta Mohanty¹, Dr. S. D. Chaudhuri², Dr. Puspita Das³

¹ PhD Scholar, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar

² Assistant Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar

³ Professor, Dept. of ECM, College of Community Science, CAU, Tura, Meghalaya

Abstract:

Mythologies play a major role in shaping our thoughts, belief, values and personality and hence, are quite instrumental in forming and reforming society's views on different issues and categories. The way we look at the mythologies influences our interpretations and understanding of the characters. One such important epic in Indian mythology is the Ramayana. The Ramayana has been re-written and recreated innumerable times by writers and poets of every era. In the contemporary time, with the advancement of technology, writers are blending the old tales with technology in a very beautiful and creative manner to convey their thoughts to the audience. One of these ways is the use of visual media like dance shows, movies, songs, and dramas. This paper focuses on three such recreations of the mythological literature the Ramayana- a dance-drama *From the Diary of Sita* by Nilimma Devi, a documentary *Laying Janaki to Rest* by Madhureeta Anand and a musical film *Sita Sings the Blues* by Nina Paley, all analysing and reinterpreting the character of Sita from the Ramayana in their own way. The paper discusses how the three mytho-visuals can be considered as a baby step to liberate women from the shackles of the patriarchal ideals of the existing ancient mythological literature.

Keywords: Mytho-visuals, the Ramayana, Revision, Recreating, Women, Liberation

Introduction:

In this world that can be full of chaos, disorder and confusion, myths bring organised and arrayed information regarding how everything started. In a way, every culture has its own myths. Myths shape the beliefs, values, thinking and perspective of a culture. It is an important aspect of that culture. Myths bring cohesiveness among the people of a society. The functions of myth still remain the same since ancient times, what changes is the mode of its transmission from one era to another. First, it was through oral form of communication, then came written sources and with the advancement of technology in modern era, new methods of passing down the stories of mythology have been adopted. In this article, we will look at some of the new, enhanced methods to make this modern generation aware of myths of their culture. The three methods being discussed here are dance-drama, documentary film and musical film. It also discusses how these ways make the absorption of myths easy but also how these modern ways can influence the modern generation by revisioning of myths suitable for contemporary canvas.

Discussion:

To start with Nilimma Devi's dance drama *From the Diary of Sita* where Sita speaks up about her experiences,

thoughts, feelings and choices. In her conversation with A.K. Ashby, Nilimma talks about how she carved a strong Sita without disembarking from the traditional story. She feels Sita was too courageous to leave her royal life and live in the forest. Moreover, in the face of so many adversities, Sita never looked helpless, rather she approached all the obstacles with all her might and strength. To make it interesting for the audience, she merged “the facets of dance, theatre, martial arts, shadow puppetry and music to convey the story” (114). Using all these things, Nilimma highlights all the decisions that Sita took herself without depending on the men in her life. Her choices displayed her strength and power. As Nilimma says, “*From the Diary of Sita* offers an image of a strong, eternal Sita” (117) who can be interpreted as a role model for women of every era. Nilimma further says, “Sita is every woman who sees truth, light and freedom underneath the shifting sands of life. The fierce courage of this divine daughter of Earth- who faces trial after trial and unimaginable heartbreaks- is ours” (117).

Madhureeta Anand’s documentary *Laying Janaki to Rest* is another example that combines visuals from the famous TV show Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayana and excerpts from “lives of women in various context of social existence” and “their understanding of Sita” (118). She highlights how Sita has always been stereotyped to condition women as per society’s norms. The society illustrates the ‘Cardboard Sita’ as a device to control women. They see Sita as a helpless lady depending on her father and husband for her protection and decisions but they don’t notice how Sita herself symbolised strength. In the documentary, Malashree Lal talks about the reason society emulate Sita for women- Sita functions within domestic space. Through interviews of three women, the ancient and modern scenarios have been compared drawing a common pattern of abandonment. Dowry deaths have been compared to agnipariksha and just like Sita was abandoned when her character was assigned, these women were accused of being of a loose character when they were unable to satisfy their husbands finally. According to Madhureeta, “Sita’s strength was her lack of fear while she was going into the forest which shows her link with the nature. A woman who has such a profound link is bound to be a very strong woman, but she is not shown as such” (120). Rather she is depicted as a meek, submissive, obedient, chaste loyal, devoted, damsel-in-distress. These characteristics of Sita are emulated by society for women, but as per Madhureeta, time has come to “redefine Sita and change the colours of her depiction to make it fit for the contemporary women” (122). She feels that for the contemporary times, we need to look at Sita from a fresh perspective. In other words, “with Sita being such a powerful influence on the Indian psyche, we need to transform the Sita myth and impart modern relevance to her to ensure” gender equality (122).

Nina Paley musical film *Sita Sings the Blue* compares Sita’s life with her own life. After Nina’s husband deserted her, she came across the story of Ramayana and realised how similar is her story with Sita’s story. She correlates Sita’s grief and pain with that of her own; as she writes, “*Sita Sings the Blues* isn’t a critique of marriage or sexist social conventions: it is an anguished critique of romantic love itself” (126). She shows through this musical film how the ordeal of love was, is and will be universal in nature.

Conclusion:

These mytho-visuals can play an integral role in incorporating myths into the contemporary canvas. In this method, the people of the contemporary era will get a more comprehensive view of the ancient myths. Today’s generation is more interested in technological innovations; thus, a visually oriented representation of mythology will interest them more than any mythological text. Thus, these mytho-visuals can play a major role in influencing the youth and their mindset.

References:

1. Lal, Malashri and Namita Gokhle, *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2009. Print.
2. Nagpal, Saraswati. *Sita - Daughter of the Earth*. New Delhi: Campfire, 2011. Print.
3. Tuttle, Lisa. *Encyclopaedia of Feminism*. Harlow: Longman, 1986. Print.