

Demytholization in Amish Tripathi's "Scion of Ikshvaku"

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ABSTRACT

In this research paper titled "Demytholization in Amish Tripathi's Scion of Ikshvaku, I am going to talk about Amish Tripathy's demytholization observed in Scion of Ikshvaku. Demytholization means The removal of mythological elements from something, especially from religious writing. In Amish Tripathy's series on Lord Shive and Ram are the examples of Demytholization. Ram and Krishna are two characters of the two great epics of India that have captivated the minds and hearts of the people for thousands of years. These two epics are not just books but a window through which Indian civilization can be viewed and understood. The word Ramayana can be translated as 'Ram's journey' Valmiki presented an idealized Image of Ram that created the foundation of faith among the people. For him, Ram was an ideal hero with all virtues. The eternal and universal appeal of the Ramayana story inspired many poets of different regions, languages and sects to compose 'Ramayana' in their own individual ways. In Indian English literature and other regional languages, poets and writers have recreated their own versions of the Rama story. Scion of Ikshvaku by Amish Tripathi is the latest addition to Rama story. The most remarkable thing about his treatment of Indian mythology is his demytholization and humanization of major mythological characters. He depicts his personages as ideal, brave, intelligent human beings instead of delineating them as deities or super human entities. Amish's Ramchandra is not a God but a human being who is a tortured and ostracized prince.

Key words: *Ramayana, Ram's journey, demytholization, Avatar, deviations.*

Ram and Krishna are two characters of the two great epics of India that have captivated the minds and hearts of the people for thousands of years. These two epics are not just books but a window through which Indian civilization can be viewed and understood. *The Ramayana* is a Sanskrit epic ascribed to the great Hindu Rishi Valmiki. The word *Ramayana* can be translated as 'Ram's journey' which in turn becomes the readers' journey towards Ram. Thematically, the *Ramayana* explores eternal human values and the concept of Dharma, not just religion as institution but duty of a person towards family, society, nation and the life in totality.

Valmiki presented an idealized Image of Ram that created the foundation of faith among the people. For him, Ram was an ideal hero with all virtues. '*The Ramayana*' became a medium of expression of ideologies relevant in different times. The story of Ram became so popular that many poets, singers and philosophers used it to express their

devotion, art and philosophy. A.K.Ramanujan called it "an endemic pool of signifiers." India is a country with pluralistic attitude towards life. It is inclusive and all-absorbing. It is said in Sanskrit that "Ekam Sadvipra Bahudha Vadanti" (The one Truth is described in different ways by the learned people).

The eternal and universal appeal of the *Ramayana* story inspired many poets of different regions, languages and sects to compose 'Ramayana' in their own individual ways. A.K.Ramanujan claimed that there are as many as three hundred different *Ramayana* that include folk stories about Rama in oral traditions.

Bhusandi *Ramayana* says, "Ramayanam anantakam (The versions of the *Ramayana* are endless).Tulsidas also wrote that the *Ramakatha* is limitless (Harikatha ananta). Romila Thapar said,"Version of *Ramayana* reflects Perspectives of periods of composition, A.A. Macdonnel acknowledged that no work of world literature

has made so profound an influence as the Ramayana on life and thought of the people. It is truly “a grammar of human relationships “. It is true that Ramayana does not belong to any particular age as there are many versions woven during different periods keeping in mind the social and cultural milieu of time and place.

A.K. Ramanujan aptly remarks that the story of Rama is so vast that no text can define it because every telling has an interpretation and every interpretation has a telling. In oral versions, there are multiple versions of the Ramayana particularly in south India and South-East Asia. There is an extensive tradition of story-telling based on Ramayana in countries like Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam, Maldives and so on. There are many regional versions with deviations such as kamban’s ‘Ramayana in Tamil, Ramcharit Manas by Tulsidas, Bengali version by kritirras, kurempu’s

Sri Ramayana Darshanam in kannada. There are also Buddhist and Jain versions of the Ramayana. In Buddhist variant , Dasaratha is depicted as the king of Benares; while in Jain Ramayana, Ravana is depicted a devout Jain and after war, Ram renounces the world and becomes a Jain monk. Another major deviant is that Ravan was killed by Lakshman. Vimalsuri, Ravisena, Gunabhadra wrote the versions of Ramayana in Jain tradition.

In Indian English literature and other regional languages, poets and writers have recreated their own versions of the Rama story. These variants and deviations are the expression of the creative urge of the writers. They have used the story of Rama to comment on the contemporary problems and issues. *Scion of Ikshvaku* by Amish Tripathi is the latest addition to Rama story. However, he does not call it Ramayana but Ramchandra series, this book being the first of the series that will follow. Amish has become quite popular with his Shiva Trilogy. The most remarkable thing about his treatment of Indian mythology is his demythologization and humanization of major mythological characters. He depicts his personages as ideal, brave, intelligent human

beings instead of delineating them as deities or super human entities.

Ram is regarded as the avatar of Lord Vishnu in India. Lord Parshuram was the sixth Vishnu according to Indian mythology. Vishnu for Amish is not just avatar or reincarnation but the title to be achieved. Ram had that potential and guru Vashistha believed that Ram would be the next Vishnu rewriting the history of the nation through his noble deeds and idealism. Amish remarks that Vishnu was an ancient title accorded to the greatest leaders, idolized as the propagators of Good. Lord Parshuram, the previous Vishnu guided people out of the age of violence to the age of knowledge. Amish demythologizes the very concept of avatars. Vashistha had a hope that Ram would complete the task lord Parshuram had left. Lord Parshuram was also Ram, The word Parshu was later added in his favorite weapon was Parshu, an axe (18).

Amish’s Ramchandra is not a God but a human being who is a tortured and ostracised prince. In most of the earlier Ramayana stories, the birth of Ram is celebrated as the advent of Avatar, the reincarnation. Amish describes Ram’s birth realistically. When he was born, he did not move and he was not breathing. Nilanjana, the doctor patted on her back to make him cry. She placed the baby by Kaushalya’s side and the queen held the motionless body of the baby to her bosom. Soon, the baby moved and gripped her hair crying out loudly (30).

On that very day, Dasharath was defeated and injured by Ravan. Therefore he considered Ram’s birth as inauspicious. The court astrologer had said that if the baby was born before midday, he would turn out to be the greatest person in history but if he was born after midday, he would suffer misfortune and never known personal happiness (31). Nilanjana had recorded the time of Ram’s birth. It was exactly midday, not a minute late, not a minute early. Dasharath was convinced that he was born with bad karma and his birth was inauspicious for the Raghu lineage.

Dasharath in Amish's book does not adore and love Kaushalya as in other Ramayana versions. This deviation also shows that Dasharath did not possess royal virtues that were required in a great king. His favorite wife was Kaikeyi who had saved his life in the battle of Karachapa. As a noble son, Ram never thought or uttered a disparaging word about Dasharath but Bharat was outspoken and minced no words criticizing Dasharath as a hopeless king. He said to Ram,

"Nobody in Ayodhya gives two hoots about a law, Dada! We are a civilization in an advanced state of decay."

Under Dasharath's rule, Ayodhya's economy was deteriorating. Once a wealthy and prosperous kingdom with wonderful architecture, Ayodhya was in a state of constant decay. Even law and order were in shambles and Ayodhyans broke every law with impunity. The rich and the nobles considered themselves above the law and they tried to brow beat the police when the law caught up with them (118). In Amish's *Scion of Ikshvaku*, the state of Ayodhya is completely in contrast with the depiction in Valmiki *Ramayana*, Tulsi's *Ramcharit Manas* or even Kamban's *Tamil Ramayana*. R.K.Narayan's versions of *Kamban Ramayana* describes Ayodhya in the following manner,

"Kosala was an extensive country and a few could claim to have crossed it end to end. Ayodhya was its capital - a city of palaces, mansions, fountains, squares and ramparts with the king's palace dominating the landscape. The city was imposing and compared well with the fabulous city of Amravati which was Indra's or Alkapuri of Kubera'.

Valmiki Ramayana depicts Dasharatha as a wise and just king.

"There reigned a king of name revered,
To country and to town endeared,
Great Dasharatha, good and sage,
Well read in scripture's holy page;
Upon the Kingdom's weal intent
Mighty and brave and provident;

The pride of old Ikshvaku's seed
For lofty thought and righteous deed."

(Valmiki Ramayana)

The character of Manthara in most of the traditional Ramayana versions is that of crooked, hunch back, limping vamp-like maid servant who incites Queen Kaikeyi to send Rama to the forest and install Bharat is the crown prince of Ayodhya. Manthara, In Amish's *scion of Ikshvaku* is a brilliant businesswoman. She was born in a poor family and in her childhood, she was afflicted with small pox that made her face scarred and ugly looking. Her right foot was partially paralyzed due to polio. Once she slipped from the balcony at a friend's house which left her disfigured. However, she regained power through her wealth that could finance the entire royal expenditure of Kosala.

Manthara had a beautiful daughter called Roshni, the rakhi sister of the four Ayodhyan princes. She was an expert vaidya (doctor) besides being an intelligent and a woman of noble virtues. She attended the sick people nursing them back to health selflessly. She was gang raped and brutally killed by Dhenuka and his gang. Roshni's death was a great shock for the masses as she was famous for her charity, grace and pious character. Many people called her the virgin Goddess. There was unprecedented rage for retribution among people. Dhenuka was under age and therefore could not be punished by law. Other seven accomplices were executed but Ram stood by law in spite of his anger at the horrible death of his rakhi sister. Dhenuka was secretly put to death by Bharat at the behest of Kaikeyi and Manthara.

There is no mention of Roshni and the gangrape by Dhenuka in any Ramayana versions. This is an imagination of Amish Tripathi who probably had Nirbhaya rape incident in mind. Amish connects the characters, incidents and thoughts with the modern context in his book making it more relevant to the modern readers.

Amish's Portrayal of Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughan also differs from traditional Ramayans to some extent. Lakshman was tall and muscular. He had vowed to protect Ram at all cost. Bharat

loved Ram like Lakshman but Lakshman always suspected his integrity. Amish depicts Bharat as ladies's man who was often infatuated by beautiful damsels. He was also a great foodie who enjoyed good, rich food. Shatrughan was a scholar, well read and well-versed in scriptures and philosophy. Ram was an ideal man, intelligent and abider of law and justice. Lakshman and Bharat felt that he was good and noble to a fault who suffered for no fault of his own.

The character of Sita is also major deviation. She was the prime minister of Mithila. Besides being a good warrior and strict administrator, She was intelligent and rational in her attitude. When Ram saw her for the first time there was a flush on his dark-skinned face. Sita had a lean and muscular physique with whitish complexion. Amish describes her character in highly poetic words. He writes:

“Had the entire universe garnered all its talents into creating a perfect face -of delicate beauty and ferocious will-this would be it” (232)

She had a look of mountain people and her warrior body had proud scars from the battle wounds. Ram was mesmerized by her beauty and demeanour. He felt that his heart found a true ally in Sita. Ram who had immense control over him felt for the first time that his heart was beyond his control. Sita invited Ram and Laxman to visit the royal garden the next day. She wanted Ram to attend Swayamvar. She was impressed by Ram's idealism and views on marriage. Deep down, She had decided to live and share her life with Ram.

At Gupt Swayamvar, Ram strung the bow, mocked the arrow and pierced the eye of the whirling fish above. Here also, Amish has made a major deviation. In valmiki Ramayana, Tulsi Ramayana and other versions, the swayamvar, test was to lift the bow of Lord Shiva and just string it. Ram not only strung it but broke it making Parshuram furious. In Amish's work, the test is quite different. He has employed the test of Draupadi Swayanvarar from *Mahabharata* in Ram story. Earlier Sita had shown the bow pinaka to Ram and asked him to practice with it. it was a legendary

bow of the previous Mahadev, Lord Rudra. Sita said that she was only a caretaker of the bow which needed great care and regular lubrication. Amish turns the bow story into realistic story of an excellent legendary bow bereft of miracles and undue halo.

At the time of Swayamvar, Ravan picked up the bow, strung it and knocked it violating the rules of the Swayamvar arrogantly. Vishwamitra declared that he had violated the sequence as Ram, the Prince of Ayodhya was first to compete in order. Ravan left the Swayamvar venue in anger with his guards. Ram won the test and also the hand of Sita whom he had already given away his heart. The wedding was simple and solemn followed by attack on Mithila by Ravan and Kumbhakarna. It was almost impossible to defeat Ravan and his huge army. Vishwamitra told Ram to use asurashtra as it was the only way to defeat Ravan. Vishwamitra was a Malaya putra, the leader of the Malaya putras. Loard Rudra had forbidden the use of asurashtra many centuries ago and those who broke the law would be punishable with banishment for fourteen years. Ram decided to accept punishment and save Mithila for the love of Sita. Later, this punishment becomes the main cause of Ram's voluntary banishment. This is also the major twist in the Ramayana Story.

The use of asurashtra results in Ravan's defeat and destruction of his army. Asurashtra was not a weapon empowered by mantra but science. It was like a missile which emitted demonic clouds of green gas. Ravan had to fly back to lanka in his pushpak vimaan. Amish describe pushpak vimaan as a giant conical craft made of some strong metal with huge rotors attached to the top of the vehicle. It made deafening sound when the rotors were in motion. Amish divests pushpak vimaan, Pinkaka bow of Lord Rudra, asurashtra and Lakshman Rekha of all miracles. He explains them in scientific and technical manner. Lakshman Rekha designed by Lakshman has been called Lakshman wall by Amish. It was an ingenious defensive feature to protect the panchavati cottage from outside attack. scientific treatment of all such

things gives his work quite convincing and realistic touch.

Kaikayi asked Dasharath her two boons which demanded Ram's banishment from Ayodhya for fourteen years and declaring Bharat, Her son the crown prince. She said that Dasharath should announce at the royal court that as Ram had broken the law of Lord Rudra, He was to be exiled for fourteen years. Ram too accepted it not just for honoring the boon given by Dasharath to kaikayi but for breaking the law of Lord Rudra. This is also a deviation from traditional versions of the Ramayana.

Shurpanakha and Vibhishan came to Panchvati and stayed there as guests. Shurpanakha was beautiful with blonde hair an up turned nose. Amish introduces her as the child of fair-skinned, light-haired foreigners of north-west. She had magnetic eyes and disproportionately large breasts. Jatayu said that vibhishan and Shurpanakha did not always see eye to eye with Ravan. And so they should not have been sent by Ravan. Vibhishan also told Ram that had escaped from Ravan's Kingdom as they had suffered a lot at his brutal hands. Jatayu and his people who guarded the panchvati were suspicious but Ram offered Vibhishan, Shurpanakha and his people shelter.

Shurpanakha was jealous of Sita and she complained about the food cooked by Sita. Sita could sense that she was attracted by Ram. Once Shurpanakha and Sita went to the river Godavari where Shurpanakha tried to make Sita unconscious by stuffing into her mouth some toxic herbs. Furious Sita dragged Shurpanakha to the cottage with her hands tide. Shurpanakha accused Sita of attacking her. Shurpanakha tried again to attack Sita with a knife but Lakshman lunged forward and banged into her. He seized her arms and pushed her back her own knife cut her nose making her cry with pain. She screamed loudly ordering Vibhishan to kill them all. She called her brother coward as he dragged her from Panchvati camp. Jatayu told Ram that Ravan Would certainly seek revenge as her sister had been injured. This

incident is also a major deviation as in other Ramayana Shurpanakha tried to seduce Lakshman and Ram in vain. Frustrated demoness tried to attack them and Lakshman cut her nose as an act of punishment. Amish's version is different as Vibhishan accompanied her to Panchvati camp. As Jatayu said It was their customary law that Ravan should retaliate as his sister's blood was shed.

Amish's characters also carry minor or major deviations. Jatayu was a maya. The captain of the Malayaputra tribe left behind by Lord Parshuram.- were a race born with deformities. kumbhakarana was also a naga , a human born with physical deformities. Ravan was great warrior with intimidating physique. His skin was pock-marked and he had a thick beard and huge handlebar moustache. He wore a headgear with six inch long horns. Kuber was a wealthy trader of Lanka. He was a fat cherubic man with round face. He wore rich jewellery and bright colorful cloths. He had effeminate manner and Dashrath looked down upon him like all vaishyas(traders). He believed that wealth was the right of a conqueror and he charged quite an exorbitant profit from him.

Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* and his Ramchandra series would be interwoven as the three major tribes would continue to dominate the next series also. These three tribes are the Vayaputras, the tribe left behind by Lord Rudra, the previous Mahadev. The Malayaputras, the tribe left behind by Lord Parshuram, the sixth Vishnu and the feared race of human being born with deformities. At the end of the book, Amish introduces the land of pariahans that lay beyond the western borders of India. It was the home to the previous Mahadev, Lord Rudra. The parihans were utterly fair-skinned with hooked ape-like noses, sharp foreheads and long locks of hair and beards. They too were Nagas and their leader had a massive frame, sturdy muscular features and godly aura. He was revered as Lord Hanuman whose duty was to protect Ram and Sita. Amish introduces Lord Hanuman at the end of the book as a parihan of awe-inspirity gait. It can be

expected that in the next book of the series, He would focus more on lord Hanuman whom mythology believes to be the next Rudra.

At few places, there are gaps that have been left unfilled by the author. However, the story of Ram by Amish is quite fascinating and realistic. The most important aspect of the book is a fine, Subtle observation on various issues of the nation, life and society. The author's creative imagination makes the book quite an interesting. Version of the great Ramayana for modern readers, particularly the youths of modern India who need to be goal-oriented, Law-abiding nation builders.

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Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.

~ Leo Tolstoy