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Mythical Metamorphosis: The Timeless Influence of Myths in Literary Realms and Retelling of *The Ramayana* by R. K. Narayan

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Abstract

*Indian literature captures the rich historical, spiritual, and cultural fabric of Indian culture through its intricate web of myths and tales. Myths have been used as a literary canvas, a source of inspiration, and a way to preserve culture in anything from classical texts to modern works. The paper explores the many ways that myths and legends have influenced Indian literature, highlighting the continuing power of these ageless stories using a variety of allusions. Myths and philosophical ideas may be found in abundance in the Vedas and Upanishads, the fundamental writings of Hinduism. The Ramayana and Mahabharata, the legendary epics and great Indian classics, continue to inspire generations of writers. This paper aims to study the retelling of myths and legends in R.K. Narayan's *The Ramayana*. The work shares a common fascination with mythology and seeks to explore the distinctive ways in which Narayan depicts myths and legends in his work, examining the theme, characters, narrative technique, cultural nuances and contemporary resonance that distinguish this literary masterpiece.*

Keywords: *Myths, Legends, Ancient Literature, Retelling, Mythical symbolism, Contemporary Literature, Intertextuality, Cultural heritage, Narrative Innovation.*

Introduction

A myth is a story that contains cultural beliefs, traditions, and explanations for the origins of the universe, natural events, and human life on Earth. It glorifies and celebrates the presence of gods, heroes, and supernatural beings transmitting deep truths and moral lessons comprising the fabric of

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narratives. Undoubtedly, mythological symbols play a crucial role in building the framework of cultural identity, moral values, and spiritual aspects of any civilisation. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, the term 'mythology' is defined as: "a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives." (Abrams & Harpham 230)

Certainly, myths have played an important role in the preservation and transmission of cultural values between generations, reflecting the social, political, and philosophical foundations of various times in world history. The foundation of world literature and classic works is deeply rooted in the Indian classics, mythological scriptural writings, and ancient literature. *The Puranas* (the 18 *Mahapuranas* and the 18 *Upapuranas*), the sacred scriptures and classic epics such as Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Ved Vyas' *Mahabharata*, as well as the *Vedas*, several other tales from the *Panchatantra*, the *Jatakas*, and the *Hitopadesha*, form the groundwork of a worldwide literary history. These ancient Indian writings, which date back thousands of years, are not only among the oldest pieces of literature but also provide a thorough expression of Indian cultural perceptions. In addition to being revered texts and important sources of inspiration for many authors, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* stand as pillars of Indian mythology. These epics have certainly attracted the attention of eminent writers who have delved into and interpreted their stories, resulting in a complex tapestry that speaks to the core of our cultural legacy. As Lauri Honko, a Finnish professor of folklore studies, writes:

Myth, a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created together with all parts thereof and given their order, which still obtains. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and establishes the sanctity of cult. (Wikipedia)

The influence of mythology is not confined to ancient writings; it pervades contemporary literature, demonstrating the timeless importance of these age-old symbolic representations. Mythological elements are often used by writers of many languages and genres to investigate universal topics, infusing their works with cultural depth and resonance. The lasting relevance of these epics demonstrates their ageless impact, which shapes the worldwide literary landscape. "The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are not just epics; they are living beings in the Indian consciousness," says Devdutt Pattanaik. According to Wendy Doniger, a well-known Hindu scholar, "the classics of Indian literature are surprisingly contemporary in their awareness of the universality of human dilemmas."

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Type of Myths

Myths can be broadly divided into three significant categories, each providing a certain purpose and function in human cultures.

- I. Etiological Myths
- II. Historical Myths
- III. Psychological Myths

Etiological myths, often known as the origin or creation myths, explain the origins of the cosmos, natural phenomena, and cultural practices. Various civilisations use creation myths to explain the beginnings of the world and humans, such as the Hindu *Rigveda* narrative of 'Purusha's' cosmic sacrifice, which shapes diverse parts of the cosmos in Indian Mythology. Similarly, In Greek mythology, Prometheus and Epimetheus are symbolic figures involved with the creation of humanity and the dispersion of features amongst animals.

Historical myths include historical events in their stories, as witnessed in great epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These epics include genuine settings and events, offering cultural and moral context in the world spectrum. Similarly, other civilizations contain historical myths, such as the *Bible*, Homer's *Iliad*, which details the *Siege of Troy*, Odysseus' return in the *Odyssey*, and Aeneas' exploits in Virgil's work.

Psychological myths investigate human awareness, emotions, and behaviours, addressing universal themes in the human experience. An exemplary specimen is the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is part of the *Mahabharata* and describes Lord Krishna imparting spiritual insight to Arjuna on the battlefield. This debate dives into existential issues, ethical quandaries, and the essence of the self, providing a psychological examination of human awareness and moral decision-making. The *Bhagavad Gita* is, unquestionably, the world's greatest psychological and practical guide, transcending chronological, cultural, and geographical boundaries. Its profound teachings serve as a universal rulebook, giving unprecedented insights into the complexity of the human psyche as well as eternal wisdom relevant to people across diverse cultures. Thus, it would be justified to quote Joseph Campbell: "...myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation." (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*)

Indeed, the usage of myth has endured throughout epochs and countries, leaving an everlasting stamp on the literary world. From Homer's epics to Shakespeare's tragedies, mythology has provided authors with endless inspiration throughout history. To quote Devdutt Pattanaik:

A myth prevents us from being reduced (as science sometimes does) to biochemical entities purposelessly storm-tossed in the quantum soup. Myth gives us a role in this world and a purpose in life. We become players in the grand scheme of things. Considering the profound nature of this communication, the myth is naturally handled

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with great reverence as it is transmitted through generations. Any attempt to violate it, not surprisingly, arouses outrage. (Mythology: Studying Myth 63)

Portrayal of Myths in Global Literary Traditions

Mythology, with its eternal themes and universal symbolism, has long been an essential part of global literature. While its origins may be traced back to ancient civilisations on the Indian subcontinent, it impacts beyond geographical limits. Ancient Greek and Roman myths, with their rich tapestry of gods and heroes, have been reinterpreted and recounted by innumerable writers, influencing the Western literary canon. Homer, Hesiod, and Virgil relied heavily on these legendary traditions in their epic works, including the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*. Later authors, like Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, reworked and recounted these tales, ensuring their continuous existence in literature. These Western classics demonstrate the central significance of myth in the narrative. They symbolise gods and heroes, using legendary elements to explore themes of heroism, destiny, and the human struggle for survival. The continuing popularity of these great works paved the path to the generations providing universal insights through the prism of mythology. Hence, major literary works can be seen stemming out of the inspiration from religious and mythological themes, generating storylines of lasting relevance. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* dives into the biblical "Fall of Man", exploring issues of free will and temptation while imbuing Satan with metaphorical complexities. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, William Blake uses religious iconography to question moral binaries and explore the interdependence of opposites. T.S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets* combines Christian mysticism and explores time, redemption, and the spiritual journey. W.B. Yeats' poetry, such as *The Second Coming*, uses Celtic and Christian symbols to communicate worries about the cyclical process. C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* uses Christian allegory to teach moral teachings through biblical themes. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* combines religious and moral symbolism, particularly the 'One Ring', which represents the corrupting temptation of power and encapsulates the perennial human struggle against absolute authority and moral issues. Whereas Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* considers faith in the face of human sorrow, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy, delves into Christian symbolism in Tess's desire for atonement. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* deals with a post-war spiritual crisis, while James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* explores Catholic symbolism in the protagonist's search for identity. Moving on to contemporary writing, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* is an example of how myth may be seamlessly integrated into a modern tale. Gaiman mixes deities from numerous myths into the fabric of modern America, investigating the changing nature of religion and the conflict between ancient and new gods. This piece demonstrates how myth may be an effective instrument for commenting on the difficulties of contemporary life. Another noteworthy example is J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which incorporates different legendary creatures and archetypal themes. Each literary work mentioned and many others contribute to the literary tapestry, connecting with everlasting themes of religion, morality, and the human spirit. These literary masterpieces have not only cherished the world's literary canvas but also present a set of practical instructions to advise social existence. As suggested by Northrop Frye: "There are and remain two

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aspects of myth: one is its story-structure, which attaches it to literature, the other is its social function as concerned knowledge, what it is important for a society to know." (*The Great Code* 47)

The Diverse World of Mythology in Indian Literature

Indian literature, with its rich history and culture, flawlessly weaves together themes that draw profound inspiration from religious and symbolic mythology. Each literary work becomes a vehicle for the spirit of age-old myths, incorporating them into the fabric of narrative. Indian literature not only tells intriguing stories but also acts as a vehicle for cultural legacy, providing readers with a meaningful view into the varied realm of mythology that has moulded the nation's narrative identity. Indeed, mythology, particularly the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, has long captivated Indian authors and provided a rich creative inheritance. From ancient writings to current works, Indian authors have been attracted to ageless storylines, using them as a source of inspiration, moral reflection, and a way to explore the intricacies of human nature. The iconic characters, epic conflicts, and moral dilemmas described in these epics continue to connect with writers, enabling them to weave fresh narratives, reinterpretations, and current reflections into these mythical epics. Rabindranath Tagore's *Mayar Khela*, A.K. Ramanujan's *The Mahabharata*, and Girish Karnad *Hayavadana* are a few among others who explore the psychological and moral components of *Mahabharata* themes in their works. Tagore's poems and novels *Gitanjali* and *The Home and the World* use symbolic legendary themes to illustrate the confrontation between modernity and tradition. The novel *Kanthapura* by Indian author Raja Rao is heavily inspired by the *Ramayana*'s cultural and mythological depth. The story is set in the imaginary town of 'Kanthapura' and revolves around the lives of its people, with a special emphasis on the protagonist Moorthy, and his role in the Indian Independence Movement. The work masterfully weaves mythological themes into its plot, and Raja Rao directly draws comparisons between characters such as Moorthy and Achyuta and the renowned figures Rama and Hanuman from *The Ramayana*.

Anita Desai's *The Fire on the Mountain* uses the tale of Narada and Chitragupta to investigate the struggle between reason and mysticism. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* includes many mythologies, while Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* reinterprets the *Mahabharata* in a contemporary Californian setting, examining love and friendship. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* combines symbols and myths to remark on Kerala's cultural standards. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* explores rural life amid industrialization, drawing on timeless motifs from Indian mythology. Kavita Kane, the famous Indian novelist, chooses the least discussed and often ignored female mythological characters for her novels as *Sita's Sister*, *Menaka's Choice*, *Lanka's Princess* and so on. Amitav Ghosh's *The Ibis Trilogy* delves into colonialism without directly addressing religious myths, instead including historical events and cultural components that represent India's intricate fabric.

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Retelling of the *Ramayana* in Indian Literary Cosmos

The present study aims to explore the retelling of the epic *Ramayana*, which has profoundly been the most fascinating subject for litterateurs throughout the centuries. Each retelling provides a unique viewpoint, emphasising distinct facets of the epic story. Particularly, the three different retellings by modern Indian authors: R.K. Narayan in *The Ramayana*, Amish Tripathi in the *Ramachandra Series*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in *The Forest of Enchantments*. Each author injects their style, cultural insights, and thematic focus into this age-old narrative, revitalising it. Through the use of mythical themes and motifs in their writing, these writers have made a vigorous contribution to the rich and varied terrain of Indian literature. Their works provide a unique combination of tradition and modernity. R K Narayan in his work *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic* seamlessly weaves ancient wisdom into retelling, fostering a profound connection for contemporary readers with the timeless moral essence of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. R.K. Narayan, known for his simplicity and narrative expertise, has written a brief and accessible retelling of the *Ramayana*. His version emphasises the characters' moral and ethical qualities. Narayan's story expertly catches the core of Valmiki's original while also adding his sense of humour and modernity. The emphasis on values and character development makes Narayan's *The Ramayana* a fascinating and thought-provoking work. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* places Sita at the center of the narrative and relates her to the present-day woman. It is one of the simplest and most beautiful retellings of the ancient epic *Ramayana*. In *The Forest of Enchantment*, Divakaruni, recognised for her feminist viewpoints, delivers a retelling that focuses on the epic's female protagonists. Divakaruni focuses on Sita, Urmila, and Surpanakha, reimagining their roles, motives, and relationships. The tale delves into topics of autonomy, sisterhood, and the influence of cultural expectations on women. By providing a voice to the traditionally underrepresented female characters, Divakaruni adds levels of depth to the conventional story, creating a more inclusive and varied interpretation. As she opines:

I'm going to write the story of *Sita*, I said because I've always been fascinated by the *Ramayan*. Just like *Panchali*, my *Sita* (Yes, with the presumptuous intimacy of authors, I thought of her as mine) will tell her tale. She'll fill in the gaps between the adventures undertaken by the male characters in the epic, their victories, and defeats. She'll tell us what inspired the crucial choices that directed the course of her life. What she believed in. What interested and moved her? How we felt when faced with the deepest of tragedies. And what gave her the ability to overcome them." (*The Forest of Enchantments*, vii).

Amish Tripathi, the famous author credited with expanding the mythological canvas by reinterpreting Lord Shiva's stories, is renowned for his inventive interpretation of Indian mythology, Amish Tripathi has enthralled readers with his captivating *Ram Chandra Series*. Through his *Ramachandra Series*, Amish Tripathi takes a creative and imaginative approach to retelling the epic, beginning with *The Scion of Ikshvaku*. Tripathi reimagines the epic with sociopolitical intrigue, rich characters, and creative world-building that differs from standard depictions. He delves into the grey

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regions of character motives and acts by combining mythology with a more current tale, challenging conventional beliefs and generating discussions about leadership, governance, and social standards. Tripathi exploring the ageless epic of the *Ramayana* provides a new interpretation of the myth. As said in a statement: “Ramayan is the proud heritage of every single Indian, regardless of religion, caste, language, or gender.” (Times of India)

These symbolic and mythical tales serve as timeless threads weaving together the fabric of cultural identity and moral setup of any society. They justifiably provide a lens through which individuals perceive the world and navigate the complexities of life. By exploring and adapting these myths, both in historical and literary contexts, humanity sustains a dynamic connection to its rich cultural heritage while fostering a vibrant and evolving narrative tradition. *The Ramayana*, with its rich combination of morality, valour, and divine intervention, has always served as an inspiration to Indian writers. It is essentially a mythical epic with moral, cultural, and religious elements. Its stories, legendary figures, and lessons add to the diverse fabric of Hindu mythology and profoundly influence the cultural and spiritual identities of millions of people even today. Remarkably, for generations writers from all across the varied linguistic geography of India have found inspiration from *Ramayana*. There is a distinctive and accomplished version of *Ramayana* in every major language spoken in our country, each dominant in its area. Millions of fluent speakers of the original languages are enthralled by these renditions. The epic story has thus survived for millennia in several languages, including Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Kashmiri, Telugu, and Hindi, representing the rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural variety throughout India.

R. K Narayan’s *The Ramayana*

The present paper aims to particularly explore R. K. Narayan’s retelling of *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*. Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (10 October, 1906 – 13 May, 2001), popularly known as R. K. Narayan, was an Indian writer and novelist best known for his works set in the imaginary South Indian town of Malgudi. He was a prominent author of early Indian literature in English, including Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. The prolific novelist R.K. Narayan is known for his skillful storytelling, set out on a literary adventure that crossed boundaries of time and society with his adaptation of the ancient Indian epic *The Ramayana*. Through his writing, Narayan expertly weaves the fabric of myths and stories, offering a condensed contemporary language version that appeals to readers of all ages. This paper examines how myths and legends are subtly portrayed in Narayan's rendition, highlighting the eternal attraction and ongoing significance of this ancient story.

The rendition begins with Dasaratha, the King of Kosala, who, on the counsel of Guru Vasishtha, conducts a ‘yagna’ that bestows him with four sons. Along with his siblings, Rama, the seventh incarnation of ‘Lord Vishnu’, and virtuous heir; grows into the most loved prince. As the story progresses, Rama and Lakshmana are instructed by the Guru Vishvamithra to help the rishis' troubled religious practices, which are constantly interrupted by malevolent spirits. Rama, the brave and

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extraordinarily skilled Kshatriya, stands firm in the face of all challenging threats while helping the Rishis. However, governed by his deeply principled and focused values, at first, he hesitates to take the life of the demon who has assumed the form of a woman. However, Viswamithra reads his mind and says: “You shall not consider her a woman at all. Such a monster must receive no consideration... This Thataka is more dreadful than Yama, the god of death, who takes a life only when the time is ripe. But this monster, at the very scent of a living creature, craves to kill and eat.”(36) Finally, Rama fiercely guards the rishis killing the demon, ensuring that their holy procedures are carried out perfectly.

Subsequently, the brothers go on a voyage to Mithila, guided by Vishvamithra, this section reveals R. K. Narayan's amazing narrative abilities. As they journey towards Mithila, an array of mythological stories emerges, including ‘Mahabali's Story’, ‘Ganga's Story’, and ‘Ahalya's Story’. These stories not only capture their mythological essence but also serve as a conduit for important life lessons, transporting the reader to a world of eternal knowledge. R.K. Narayan exhibits his deft and precise narrative skills, translating complex subjects endowed with legendary grandeur into a conversational masterpiece. A series of wonderful happenings culminate in the chance meeting of two heavenly beings incarnated as humans—the divine marriage of Vishnu and Lakshmi. In these chapters, Narayan skillfully conveys the intricacies of human psychology through Rama and Sita's budding passion for each other. Their infatuation developed through a chance meeting culminates in the holy tie of marriage. The simplicity of language can be seen throughout the narration: “At an auspicious conjunction of the planets suitable to the horoscopes of Rama and Sita, in ceremonials conducted by the high priests of Mithila and Ayodhya in Janaka’s court, Rama and Sita became man and wife.” (54)

After their return to Ayodhya, a pivotal moment transpires as King Dasharatha resolves to crown Rama. However, the grandeur of the coming royal festival is derailed unexpectedly when Kaikeyi, one of Dasharatha's three queens, intervenes. Her firm involvement reminds the king of two promises given in the past, shattering Rama's eagerly anticipated coronation. This episode demonstrates R. K. Narayan's outstanding ability at precise narrative. The story skillfully weaves a thread of emotions, depicting a father's grief, a beguiled wife's forceful efforts to change the course of action altering her husband's choice, and Rama's extraordinary submission to his father's decree, Sita's unshakable commitment to stand by her husband throughout difficult times. Meanwhile, Lakshmana's fervent reaction to Kaikeyi, as well as his enduring reverence and love for his elder brother, Dasharatha's undying affection, and the societal complexities depicted, all contribute to a vivid depiction of a worldly life deeply entwined in social complexities and collaborative endeavours. As Bharata relinquishes the throne, accepting Rama as the true heir, and Rama resolutely follows his father's words, Narayan expertly weaves the story, conveying a profound lesson to the present generation. By drawing similarities to current socioeconomic realities, He encourages mankind to reconsider its founding concept of prioritising selfless giving: “In a world where we are accustomed to rivalries over possession, authority, and borders, and people clashing over the issue, “Ours,” or

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“Mine, not yours,” it is rather strange to find two people debating whose the kingdom is not, and asserting: “Yours, not mine.” (80)

The ramifications of Vardaan's accomplishment are severe, resulting in Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana being banished for a treacherous 14-year excursion in the Dandaka Forest. Further, Soorpanakha unrelenting fascination with Rama sets off a tragic chain of events. This chapter is a moving study of a woman's ardent yearning to own the most amazing human on earth. As she submits: “It's not proper for a woman of breeding to state her innermost feelings, but I dare to do it, driven to desperation by the attacks of the god of love. Forgive me . . .” (83) However, Rama's considerate refusal to submit to the repeated advances and solicitations of a stubborn woman who is prepared to go to any length to get his attention, demonstrates the depth of his character as widely revered ‘Maryada Purushottam’.

R.K. Narayan's psychological intricacies are expertly woven throughout, forming a bridge that connects with the modern age. In a mesmerising temporal leap, Narayan seamlessly transfers the reader from the distant past to the present, ensuring that the ageless themes of true love, false obsession, and sophisticated resistance transcend thousands of years.

Now unfolds the historic event in the epic — the abduction of Sita by the demon king Ravana, setting the series of events that epitomise the triumph of righteousness over wrongdoing. This is the most resonating message and the precious gift of revered wisdom to the world beyond time and boundaries through the celebrated epic *Ramayana*. Through the help of Hanuman and Sugriva, Rama prepares an army to fight with Ravana. Hanuman is sent to discover Sita's location in Lanka. Hanuman, Rama's devoted disciple, goes to Lanka to deliver Rama's message to Sita and returns with a piece of Sita's jewelry for Rama's assurance of their meeting. Following a daring rescue expedition, Rama and Ravana engage in an epic fight that ends with Rama defeating Ravana and saving Sita. The story comes to an end with mesmerising victory of truth over all evils. R. K Narayan's *The Ramayana* ends with Ram, Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman's celebrated return to Ayodhya.

The genius of Narayan is in his ability to condense the complex story of *The Ramayana* into a clear and understandable format. He maintains the spirit of the myths and tales while making them accessible to a modern audience by cutting the narrative down and simplifying the vocabulary and language. Maintaining the epic's grandeur, this skill of simplifying makes it more approachable for people who are not versed in the subtleties of ancient Indian literature. Narayan's recounting stands out in part because of his focus on the human side of supernatural figures. In *The Ramayana*, gods and goddesses struggle with moral decisions, family obligations, and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships rather than remote, inaccessible entities. By giving these mythological beings a human face, Narayan encourages readers to identify more deeply and intimately with the characters, bridging the gap between the real and the legendary. The moral conundrum that Prince Rama, the embodiment of righteousness, faces when presented with difficult decisions, is at the core of *The Ramayana*. Infusing the story with a moving examination of responsibility, morality, and sacrifice, Narayan deftly

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handles Rama's expulsion and Sita's future exile. Rama's inner conflicts serve as a mirror for the common human experience, striking a chord with readers as they consider their moral dilemmas.

We see the suffering of a woman who was kidnapped by the demon king Ravana through Sita's perseverance. In Narayan's interpretation, it is shown with subtlety and tenderness. Sita's persona is elevated above the typical damsel in distress, thanks to her courage and resiliency, especially during her trial by fire. Sita from Narayan becomes a representation of the tenacity and resilience of women, questioning traditional gender norms and providing a progressive reinterpretation of this iconic female figure. Here the treatment given to the character of Sita sets a parallel with Divakaruni's Sita and Kavita Kane's Sita. All of them have tremendously represented in Sita a today's woman.

The Exploration of Mythical Constructs in Narayan's *The Ramayana*

Cultural Context and Mythical Resonance

Narayan's *The Ramayana* digs deep into Hindu mythology, recounting the ancient epic ascribed to Valmiki and taking inspiration from the Kamban *Ramavataram*. It encompasses India's cultural and spiritual ethos, embracing the essence of dharma (righteousness) as well as the moral quandaries confronting its protagonists. As he once said:

I was impelled to retell the Ramayana and the Mahabharata because that was the great climate in which our culture developed. They are symbolic and philosophical. Even as mere stories they are so good. Marvellous. I couldn't help writing them. It was part of the writer's discipline. (The Indian Epics Retold, xi)

By carefully preserving the cultural underpinnings of *Ramayana*, Narayan crafts a narrative that is relevant in a variety of cultural contexts. "In this way, Rama continued to live among his people, visiting their homes, inquiring about their welfare, offering them counsel when needed. His princes and officials also maintained similar contact with the people." (122) This meticulous attention to detail highlights the characters' lasting human traits while simultaneously engrossing the reader in the cultural affluence of the epic. Since Narayan's characters are diverse and capture the richness of a given cultural setting, social interactions are shown more accurately. *The Ramayana* becomes a live monument to the vast fabric of Indian tradition because of this attention to cultural intricacies.

Humanising the Divine

Narayana brings the narrative to life using his dynamic characterisations, constructing individuals who thrive as mirrors reflecting the social, moral, and cultural context. Narayan's version of the *Ramayana* highlights the humanity of its celestial figures. Rama, Sita, and Hanuman are not faraway deities, but rather humans dealing with difficulties and emotions. One of the remarkable aspects of Narayan's retelling is his emphasis on the human dimensions of the divine characters. These gods and goddesses are not distant, untouchable beings but individuals grappling with moral dilemmas, familial

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responsibilities, and the complexities of human relationships. By humanising these legendary figures, Narayan prompts readers to connect with the characters on a deeper, more personal level. Rama consistently addressed everyone in the crowd, asking, “How are you? Are your children happy? Do you want any help from me?” They happily answered, “With you as our prince and your great father as our guardian, we lack nothing”. (30) Narayan gives the epic a personal touch by showing a prince and future king interacting directly with the populace, making it incredibly approachable for modern viewers. This narrative method, without a doubt, presents an extraordinary type of governance that is marked by empathy and compassion.

The reader can relate to the retelling easily, especially as it explores the two couples' heartfelt desire, which evokes an emotional connection that is similar to what regular men and women go through. As he gives in to the temptation of fantasising about the glances of Sita, Rama's deepest passions come to a head, establishing a strong emotional connection between the reader and the character. “Even if I cannot take her in my arms, shall I ever get another glimpse, however briefly, of that radiant face and those lips? Eyes, lips, those curly locks falling on the forehead—every item of those features seemingly poised to attack and quell me—me, on whose bow depended the destruction of demons, now at the mercy of one who wields only a bow of sugarcane and uses flowers for arrows . . .” At the heart of *The Ramayana* lies the moral dilemma faced by Prince Rama, who, despite being the epitome of virtue, confronts agonising choices. When sage Vishwamithra asks him to demolish Tadka: “Rama hesitated; for all her evil, she was still a woman. How could he kill her...” (36)

Narayan adds feminine perspectives that give the story more depth, agency, and complexity by infusing Sita's femininity with character traits like tender infatuation, genuine dedication, exceptional patience, exquisitely elegant endeavour, and brave tenacity. In a sudden transition, the goddess Sita transforms into an ordinary woman, her royal majesty temporarily forgotten, as she is greatly fascinated by Rama's endeavour. Sita experiences a stimulating exhilaration at Rama's mere presence, immersing herself in the fascination of his beauty. Her inner universe is obscured when she utters:

Shoulders of emerald, eyes like lotus petals, who is he? He invaded my heart and has deprived me of all shame! A robber who could ensnare my heart and snatch away my peace of mind! Broad-shouldered, but walked off so swiftly. Why could he not have halted his steps, so that I might have gained just one more glimpse and quelled this riotous heart of mine? He was here, he was there next second, and gone forever. He could not be a god—his eyelids flickered. . . Or was he a sorcerer casting a spell on people? (46)

Indeed, the writer exhibits an outstanding command of descriptive and psychoanalytical talents, expertly stretching the limits to probe deeply into a woman's deep insights. The narrator masterfully conveys the rich layers of a woman's mind, depicting the sensitivity, enchantment, and desire that define her emotions' complex topography. The capacity to describe the complexities of

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Sita's emotions demonstrates a thorough awareness of human psychology and a deep sensitivity to the intricacies of the human experience. It is a credit to the author's skill that they can paint such a vivid and evocative image of the emotional journey, crafting a story that captures the beauty and complexity of human emotions. Sita's character undergoes a remarkable evolution, from a young, naive princess with turbulent psychological bearings to an intensely firm life partner who is prepared to give up all luxuries to share hardships. She evolves from a soul full of temptation towards a golden deer to embody Shakti, a formidable force that opposes Ravana's rule and faces the demon by herself.

R.K. Narayan effectively personifies his legendary female figures, such as Sita and Draupadi, by bestowing upon them heavenly symbolism and an intrinsic, magnetic beauty capable of enthralling their male counterparts. He eloquently articulates the innermost sentiments of Rama: "He stood arrested by her beauty, and she noticed him at the same moment. Their eyes met. They had been together not so long ago in Vaikunta, their original home in heaven, as Vishnu and his spouse Lakshmi...Sita, decked in ornaments and flowers, in the midst of her attendants, flashed on his eyes like a streak of lightning." (44-45) Similarly he does with one of his widely discussed figures Panchali "the goddess Lakshmi herself in stature, grace, and complexion; eyes like lotus petals; a woman who is an ideal wife to guide, serve, and sustain a man at all times". (*The Indian Epics Retold*, 260)

Sita's resilience and strength, particularly during her trial by fire, are highlighted, elevating her character beyond the traditional damsel in distress. Narayan's Sita becomes a symbol of feminine strength and endurance, challenging conventional gender roles and offering a progressive reinterpretation of this iconic female figure. This method gives complex representations of feminine endurance and strength while challenging stereotypes.

A Major focus of Narayan's narrative tapestry lies on Hanuman, a figure who has been skillfully woven with great devotion. Hanuman, the embodiment of truth, strength and selfless devotion, symbolises the most Hanuman's undying dedication to Rama is highlighted magnificently, and he emerges not just as a legendary character, but also as a deep metaphor of unbounded commitment and selflessness. Narayan's depiction of Hanuman raises him beyond the level of conventional narrative, imbuing him with traits that go beyond legend. The pages come alive with the vibrancy of Hanuman's unwavering devotion to Rama, which is both lovable and deeply inspirational. Hanuman's representation goes beyond mythology to become a representation of unwavering commitment and selfless devotion. Narayan emphasises the strength of faith and devotion through Hanuman's persona, reiterating themes that are relevant not just in the context of Indian mythology but also in a variety of cultural contexts. In Narayan's hands, Hanuman becomes a literary symbol, representing the everlasting ideals of faith and unshakable devotion. The retelling becomes a canvas on which the power of faith and selfless devotion is painted, resonating not just within the rich fabric of Indian mythology, but also touching the hearts of readers from other backgrounds and traditions across time and culture.

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In his portrayal of Ravana, Narayan deftly avoids a stereotypical depiction of the demon solely governed by a soul of sin. Instead, he provides a more nuanced viewpoint that humanises Ravana's demeanour. Though Narayan too has positioned his Ravana as the antithesis of all righteousness, and the personification of wrongdoing, his character leaves readers with a swirl of emotions. This image, more human than symbolic, encourages introspection, causing us to look inside ourselves for human flaws such as greed, obsession, ego, brutality, partiality, and many expressions of evil. In this sophisticated investigation, Ravana becomes more than simply a distant foe, but also a mirror reflecting parts of the human condition that may be painfully similar, forcing us to face our weaknesses and moral ambiguities.

Narrative Techniques and The Art of Simplification

R. K. Narayan uses a clear language style that simplifies the ancient epic for contemporary audiences while maintaining its core. The narrative's accessibility is enhanced by the simplicity of its language. His brilliance lies in his ability to condense the intricate narrative of *The Ramayana* into a concise and accessible form. By simplifying the language and streamlining the storyline, he ensures that the essence of the myths and legends remains intact while making it approachable. This art of simplification does not dilute the grandeur of the epic but rather renders it more palatable for readers unfamiliar with the intricacies of classical Indian literature and ancient myths. In this rendition, we see various traits that are typical of R.K. Narayan's creative style. He has created vivid imagery through his words while painting the picture of Mithila:

On lofty terraces women were singing and dancing to the accompaniment of veena and soft drums. Couples on swings suspended from tall areca poles enjoyed the delight of swaying back and forth, their necklaces or garlands flying in the air. Rama and Lakshmana went on past shops displaying gems, gold, ivory, peacock feathers, beads, and wigs made of the hair of rare Himalayan deer. They observed arenas where strange elephant fights were in progress, cheered by crowds of young men; groups of women practising ballads and love songs under wayside canopies; horses galloping without a break round and round bridle tracks, watched by elegant men and women; swimming pools with multicoloured fish agitated by people sporting in the water. (45)

The creation of a symbolic imagery, "Each arrow of his was a missile of dharma, a statement of the power of the law" (56), raises the epic to a plane beyond the everyday elevating his characters above the story and making them represent more universal human experiences. His mastery of the English language is especially noticeable, with precision and a subtle intonation that seamlessly loses its foreign implications. This linguistic elegance provides a perfect medium for a quick and dynamic narrative pace. Notably, *The Ramayana* has some of Narayan's most exquisitely designed set pieces, including a stunning representation of the end of the rainy season:

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Peacocks came out into the sun shaking off clogging droplets of water and fanning out their tails brilliantly. Rivers which had roared and overflowed now retraced their modest courses and tamely ended in the sea. Areca palms ripened their fruits in golden bunches; crocodiles emerged from the depths crawling over rocks to bask in the sun; snails vanished under slush, and crabs slipped back under ground; that rare creeper known as vanji suddenly burst into bloom with chattering parrots perched on its slender branches. (6)

R.K. Narayan stands out as a master storyteller and purveyor of unique style in the realms of literary affluence and narrative craft. Narayan reduces his emphasis on the complexities of battle scenes, digging into the intricacies of daily existence rather than dwelling on the complexity of combat. As an excellent writer of realistic fiction, Narayan turns his narrative lens to the intricacies of everyday life. This change in emphasis is clear when he describes the large crowd who gathered to attend Rama's wedding ceremony.

Conclusion

The Ramayana, an ancient Indian epic believed to date back to 1500 B.C. by scholars, continues to have a significant impact on the contemporary world in variety of ways. The epic, credited to the sage Valmiki, is more than just a story of myth and legend; it is a repository of ageless knowledge, providing essential teachings and insights that are relevant to practical administration and daily life. Its historical origins may be traced back to a time before most written records were created. However, its long-term importance is seen in how it continues to impact cultural norms, moral ideals, and governance principles in contemporary India and the world. With a central theme as dharma, or ethical obligation, it helps people resolve ethical challenges and make decisions. The characters, particularly Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Hanuman, exemplify characteristics that are still relevant today. The story progresses as a kingship chronicle, depicting the problems that the kings like Dasharatha and Rama encounter. The ideals of fair rule, obligation, and leadership by example are vital teachings for individuals in powerful positions. *The Ramayana* emphasises the value of family relationships and the obligations that come with them. The familial bond between Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, and Bharat demonstrates dedication, sacrifice, and unshakable support within a family. The notion of karma has been wonderfully advocated emphasising how one's deeds have consequences. This concept is prevalent in modern conversations about accountability and responsibility. The influence goes beyond religion and literature to include art, music, dance, and popular culture. Festivals such as Diwali, which commemorates Rama's return to Ayodhya, highlight the epic's lasting cultural relevance. The telecast of *Ramayana* as the most popular TV shows will keep ruling the heart of Indian viewers for the generations to come. Even kids' show like 'Bal Hanuman', the series like 'The Legends of Hanuman' have a great influence on the silver screen. In a world of fast change and uncertainty, these legendary myths of *Ramayana* serve as a lighthouse, providing eternal counsel for managing life's challenges.

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To conclude, R.K. Narayan's *The Ramayana* stands as a testament to the enduring power of myths and legends. Through his eloquent prose and astute storytelling, Narayan bridges the gap between the ancient and the contemporary, inviting readers to explore the timeless themes embedded in this epic narrative.

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