

# An Analysis on Hindu Sacred Lore in the Works of Devdutt Pattanaik

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**Abstract: Introduction** – The society has progressed so much with the help of ancient Hindu sacred lore. These teachings helped readers and civilizations to grow significantly. There is a vast diversity to explore in Indian literature. It is a collection of studies in various Indian languages like Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati, Odia, Malayalam, Urdu, etc. Somehow, all such writings explore both sides of decorum of a region in some ways or the other. Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik is an illustrator, writer, lecturer and mythologist who are highly inclined in transferring the pertinence of mythology and past in the modern world. These ancient sacred teachings are the tool for him to reflect society.

**Objective** – This paper is aimed to analyze the elements of Hindu Sacred Lore in the works of Devdutt Pattanaik and the presence of queerness in today's society. The mythology is also helpful to discuss social issues like feminism, gender parity, queerness, and patriarchy. This paper is aimed to create a broad perception through the multicoloured lenses of Pattanaik.

**Results** – This study pursues an analogy from history to the modern world in the works of Devdutt Pattanaik. He spreads subdued voices in vast narratives of mythology. This paper discovers different kinds of interpretation and retelling of mythology and myth by the most popular Indian mythologist. He is experienced in telling mythological tales and sacred lore in an engaging and subtle way. He preaches every element of Gods and Goddesses and Indian culture logically. He understands various dimensions of the subject.

**Key Words:** Indian mythology, Indian culture, Hindu Sacred Lore, Devdutt Pattanaik, mythology, queerness, Indian literature.

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

Indian literature is the rich source of scriptures, Vedas and Puranas. These consist of different types of literature like Bhakthi, Vir Gatha, Puranas, and oral retellings. These texts provide a range of mythologies rooted deeply in the conscious minds of Indians. Legends enlighten people about their traditions, beliefs, and culture that have been forgotten. These tales build metaphysical and moral concepts of culture. Hence, it is clear that culture is rooted deeply in Hindu sacred lore.

Even before the writing skills arrived, oral tradition brought myths to society. It laid the foundation stone of culture, religions, literature, philosophies, tradition, art and custom in civilization. In a civilization, it is a myth that gives and frames structure to the culture of that civilization. Hence, one can get a deep insight into the social structure and belief system by studying scriptures, myths, sacred books, and epics of a specific religion.

### 1.1 Background

There are four yugas in Hinduism – Treta Yuga, Satya Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and finally Kali Yuga, which is currently running. There is a different quality in each Yuga. For example, the concept of patriarchy was formed and well-revered in Satya Yuga. The concept of morality was widely recognized in Treta Yuga. Dwapara Yuga marks the end of morality and beginning of spiritual yoga practice. Finally, Kali Yuga collapses every structure and enlightens the queerness. A mind that is overwhelmed with insecurities, focused more on power, and that loses faith marks the shift of yugas. Everything is on the verge of devastation with the end of each yuga. The ultimate end of the world comes with the Pralaya (apocalypse) as in scriptures. The lifecycle in the world restarts after the Pralaya and after the Kali Yuga, the cycle of Yugas will restart from the Satya Yuga.

Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik, born in 1970, is an Indian mythologist, illustrator, author and speaker. He was a physician who later became the best-selling theorist and author who works especially on religion, culture, mythology, rituals, and contemporaneity. In this day and age, he focuses mainly on the relevance of mythology. He is indulged in innovation in leadership, governance, and management. He is well regarded for integrating epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata in the concept of HRM practices. Some of his best-selling works are “Ramayana versus Mahabharata: My Playful Comparison”, “Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata”, “Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You”, “The Book of Ram” and “Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Indian Mythology”. Myths integrate and contribute to

society according to him. He has critical, inspiring, forethought, and innovative views on mythology, politics, business and sexuality.

## 1.2 Literature Reviews

The social, cultural, and spiritual dominion of Brahmanical order in ancient India was based on its role on sacred knowledge from the Vedas. The lawgiver in ancient India, Manu in “Manusmriti” and his text on “dharma” proclaimed that the importance of knowledge provider is higher than that of life givers, i.e. parents. To strengthen the paternalistic relationship between the master and his student, a student must live in the “gurukul” or guru’s ashram in his Brahmacharya (the celibate life of student) in Vedic tradition. It means a teacher is held liable for every part of the life of his disciple (Gill, 2013).

In “The Leadership Sutra (2016)”, Pattanaik strings a range of sutras or formulas which help organizations to know the strength of management with appropriate references to the epics of India and other tales from mythologies of India to show his aphorisms. He discusses how four things are built up during the first meeting – me and mine, and you and yours. Hence, Pattanaik differentiates between relationship and transaction. He added, “It is a transaction when there is an exchange of “yours” for “mine”. It is a relation when there is an impact of “who I am” on “who you are”. He proposes this formula with an example of bond between Sugriva and Rama, when they expected something from one another. On the other hand, when Ram meets Hanuman, it was a relationship more than expectations. The very entity of Hanuman built a transformation because of this relationship. Shetty & Chowdhury (2020) took this thought ahead in this context to study several people and acquaintances in the lives of Sita and Draupadi individually and defied their relationship with people in “Relationships vs. Transactions” in Pattanaik’s works. Both women built several bonds with people in their lifetime and played several roles in their lives.

Studying queerness is a completely dynamic area which is spreading day by day to add new cultures of kinship and intimacy, new histories, and new queer identities. The Queer Theory was reclaimed in the beginning of 1990s in the US simultaneously, when Gay and Lesbian studies were being shifted to queer studies. The world is also heading to intellect, technology, and being more welcoming for innovations over time. But LGBT community is still ironically looked at with denial. The notion of LGBT turns over the idea of sexual desires and sexualities. Hence, it is vital to rewind to the earlier epoch of prehistoric anecdotes and myths to reaffirm the belief of a more tolerant country. The ancient Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata suggest that Indian society was more liberal before Anno Domini than in the modern world. Boral & Vashisht (2021) selected the book “Shikhandi and Other Queer Tales they don’t tell you” by Devdutt Pattanaik to explore more queer tales that have been hidden in several ancient literatures.

The book “Shikhandi and Other Tales They Don’t Tell You” combines a lot of short stories from several Indian myths. He explores the queer narratives in folklores which discuss the lesbians, gays, and hijras perceived in Indian society. The book accepts “queer behaviour” whether it is related to homosexual relations or cross dressing, as completely normal. It leaves social rejection or acceptance to culture, which is a time-limited and dynamic construct. The collection of short stories shed light on the suppressed voices in the grand narratives (Alisha, 2018).

## 1.3 Research Question

- What perception does Devdutt Pattanaik show about some Indian sacred lores through his works?

## 1.4 Importance of the Study

This paper explains how ancient mythology has been helpful to enlighten today’s youth in the modern world. Somehow, it delivers the fact that there is a lot to learn from ancient sacred lore to achieve great wisdom and progress and make this world a better place to live. The paper opens further research paths for scholars to explore the teachings from various other works of Devdutt Pattanaik.

## 1.5 Research Objectives

- To explore Devdutt Pattanaik’s perception on Hindu sacred lore through his works
- To discuss Hindu stories in light of “Shikhandi and Other Queer Tales They Don’t Tell You”

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Hindu sacred lore or mythology is a body of myths in ancient Indian texts like Vedic literature, Puranas, and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, and also in regional literature like “Naalayira Divya Prabandham”, “Tamil Periya Puranam” and Bengal’s “Mangal Kavya” (Macdonell, 1978; Hopkins, 1986; Bonnefoy et al, 1993). Hindu sacred lore also has presence in several famous texts that have been widely translated, including the fables of the “Hitopadesha” and the “Panchatantra”, along with Southern Asian works (Olivelle, 1999; Waldau & Patton, 2006).

Mythology is usually defined in academic studies as the stories that have been deeply rooted in society and world order, the origins and foundations of society, narratives for creating society, their original heroes, their god(s),

the concept of “afterlife”, etc. It is a very specific outline of some of the common Hindu sacred tales with such themes. The term “myth” is just a traditional story. It is often limited to sacred stories by several scholars.

Folklorists usually define myths as stories that are mostly sacred, tales which are believed to be true, and set in different parts of the worlds or distant past with superhuman or heroic features. In this article, Hindu sacred lore is analyzed specifically in the works of the most celebrated contemporary author Devdutt Pattanaik. The data for fulfilling the above objective is collected from several journals, articles, blogs, and books written by Pattanaik and other authors to explore his perception on Indian mythology.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF STUDY:

Devdutt Pattanaik attempts to present a new perception of some of the myths in light of his famous book “Shikhandi and Other Queer Tales They Don’t Tell You”. The book is also focused on Hindu tales from various areas. It has references to some of the Buddhist and Jainism mythology stories as they focus more on karma (actions) and samsara (the cycle of death and rebirth), the most prominent aspects of Hinduism. There are two parts of “Shikhandi and Other Queer Tales They Don’t Tell You”. The author plays his estimations on queerness brilliantly in the first part in regards to quoted myths worldwide. All such myths guarantee the fables in the second half. The next part consists of selected narratives in Indian mythology. The unseen queerness of mythology is well described by Pattanaik. Legends go even further with gender parity, feminism, individualism, and patriarchy. Pattanaik says,

“Humanity's discoveries and innovations are shared by history, signs, and practices over centuries. These are linked to both the conscious mind and the subconscious mind. The study of the stories, symbols, and traditions is mythology. Religion is formed as certain stories and practices become static and are followed by a body that demands access to divine authority.” (Shikhandi, p9)

#### **Question 1: What perception does Devdutt Pattanaik show about some Indian sacred lores through his works?**

Some myths are overlooked in Hinduism as they are considered somewhat intolerable and degrading. People don’t even tell or retell these stories on several events. Dr. Pattanaik focuses on those sacred lores with a different view that acknowledges and praises everything by perceiving them as completely “normal” and “natural”. One could see his opinions on several things with current myths apart from civilizations’ history. Hence, he uses his creativity to create/recreate sense behind the myths. He takes readers to a new world of novel impressions. He swallows mythopoeia to deliver the hidden and harsh realities. Writers have adopted “Mythopoeia” as a tool to portray myths with creativity. One can observe this technique in action in the second part where he brings out supernatural factors and magic in the stories apart from his diverse “school of thoughts”.

The book is more related to queerness but the author still focuses on other features that are included in the book and that are important to the public. It is worth noting that Pattanaik associates everything to Indian society. Each story in this book is eye-opening. Initially, the text exposes the world to the knowledge about “queerness” and global mythology. Next part discusses queer elements in Indian myths. Mythologies have an important part in the survival of mankind by looking closely. Mahabharata has a reference to the period when the concept of marriage was “irrelevant”. The fidelity of women and ownership was considered more important in the notion of fatherhood, which ultimately turned the perception on marriage. Other ideas like inheritance, property, etc. came from the idea of fatherhood.

Hindu scriptures have the idea of “feminism”, where men and women are considered equal. According to Hindu sacred lores, there is no gender of the soul, but the body has. Only those people who are not enlightened would look at the body more than the soul. Everything is based on external appearance in the modern world. People focus more on physical elements like color, gender, culture, language etc. There are still different prejudices even by accepting queer and there are exploitations even at home and workplaces.

Everything was divided with the identity of the body. It has led to the change in relationship between male and female in the past and monastic period led to more divisions of these sexes. Females were further categorized into groups like evil, temptress, good women, widow, deemed women, sanyasi, and devadasi. This era had also given more importance to the concept of chastity. The division in the past is further reflected in society. Pattanaik depends strongly on the facts and traces the roots of some histories and beliefs. His views prick the consciousness of mankind indirectly with his unbiased remarks on various mythological characters like Chudala, Shikhandi, Mohini avatar, and various forms of Lord Krishna. The author considers modern society to interpret the ancient stories.

Human beings are categorized as “Prakriti” (female) and “Purusha” (male) as per their genders in the Vedas, but “Tritiya Prakriti” (third gender) is another category along with those. According to Pattanaik, Hindu mythology has a lot of references to the concept that questions beliefs of only femininity and masculinity and the queerness (Shikhandi, 12). Pattanaik focuses on some words from Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit suggesting queer behaviours and thoughts, i.e. “Napumsaka” (impotent man or eunuch), “Kliba” (neuter), “Sanda”, “Panda”, “Mukhabhaga”, “Hijra”, “pedi”, and “Pandaka” (homosexual). These words suggest the way of expressing the queer divisions.

Using several references from mythologies like North American tribes' beliefs on "two spirits" (people having qualities of both male and female), mythology in Cuban Santeria (the myth of sea goddess and her son), Ascetic mythology (the myth of Xochipilli "a flower prince"), the mythology of ancient Egypt (which includes Horus and Osiris), the myth of Vikings and Odin, the Inari's myth in Shinto mythology of Japan, the Taoist mythology in China (including Lan Caihe), the myth of "Ahriman" devil in Persian mythology, and Enki's myth in Mesopotamian mythology, Pattanaik shows his views on "queerness". He analyzes his views on various mythologies and adds universal perception. His cognizance is universally applicable and it is beyond Hindu mythology. This work has become more relevant in this day and age due to this universality.

The author raises the question on benightedness, severity, and demarcation in Indian society with a detailed briefing on the past and history. To discuss the true feel of those ideas, Pattanaik relies on Indian mythological tales with a novel approach. Hindu mythology is based on the way we perceive the world, what is seen, what is left, and why some things are seen/unseen (Shikhandi, 30). The author admits that there is a significance of the rituals, rules, and other practices. All such practices and traditions integrate different people in the society. It also builds awareness related to diversity. But the true essence is lost somewhere in the biased and modern society and its mentality.

Pattanaik interrogates how queer aspects are built and set up in a different level from the mythology sternly in metaphysical terms rather than humane terms. The concept of queerness became inconspicuous and invalid due to metaphysical elucidation. Pattanaik seeks readers' attention to the distorted, forgiven, and hidden facts of Hindu sacred lore.

#### **4. RESULTS :**

Most parts of mythologies are stretched orally. The mythologies have different versions which are warped in society. The people play a vital role who write and spread mythological tales. They deliver their ideas through their stories and works. Each writer or storyteller has different beliefs or perceptions. It forms several versions of the same story. For example, there are so many versions of Ramayana, Bhagwad Geeta, Veda, Purana, and Mahabharata across India and the world. The storyteller or writer influences the perception, ideas and opinions indirectly. One cannot accept the variant of these epics by perceiving hidden voices of queer people in the biased society.

Pattanaik uses ancient mythology to expose the harsh reality of the modern world. Somehow, he explains the fact that society doesn't consider everyone competent and equal even after having so much wisdom and progress. Mythology is used as a way to mirror the biases of society. He relates a lot of characters in his book around modern people. According to him, mythology is exploring the subjective realities of mankind as they are expressed through symbols, traditions, stories, practices, rituals, and beliefs. The coherence and sanity of mankind bear subjective reality a little bit (Shikhandi, 35). Pattanaik relates the fact in mythologies in his interview. He said, "Facts are everyone's truth. Fiction is nobody's truth. Myths are somebody's truth" (Pattanaik).

Both Ramayana and Mahabharata are the most sacred and oldest epics and the tales are about role models and elite warriors of Bharath. An important part of Mahabharata is Bhagavad Gita, which is written originally in Sanskrit. In the epic Mahabharata, Shikhandi was the character who was on a mission to take revenge from Bhishma. Shikhandi was born as a girl but grew up as a boy. His wife gets shocked with his femininity on the wedding night. Shikhandi borrows the manhood of Stunna to deal with the issue of flexibility. The text borrows supporting descriptions and accords with gender neutrality by leading proponents like Lord Vishnu, Lord Krishna, Goddess Parvathi, and Lord Shiva.

The book explores the concept of "one law" and truth that is followed by mythologies in a compulsive manner apart from critical and scientific thinking. The concept of truth could be different for various people. It always causes the judgments and disagreements of such arguments that are based on human ideologies, prejudices, and predefined notions. It was possible in the past but the concept of "truth shall prevail" is encouraged in modern academic literature and that all truths must be considered equally. As myths are important for the lives of people, Pattanaik combines the same legends for the community in the second part of Shikhandi. It has a major impact on literature. This one trial flourished queer literature in Indian literary theme. He further explains the concept with most common topics like feminism, gender parity, and patriarchy through mythology.

#### **5. CONCLUSION :**

Mythology is very important for mankind as it has answers to a lot of religious questions and it also has differences between what is evil and what is good. Any mythology is usually the journey and struggles of a protagonist in ethical life. He also faces circumstances and consequences of evil and good deeds and learns a lot of moral lessons which help them to defeat the evil within and in the society at the end. He stands for what is right finally, which is known as "Dharma" in Hindu mythology. The descendants of "Manu", the humans of "Manavas" are proposed to follow Dharma, which is based on responsibilities and roles. Every creature has its role to play in this world. This duty leads to desires and creates a space in which even the weakest can live and grow (Pattanaik, 2006).

In his famous TV show "Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik" in EPIC channel, he answers a lot of questions based on Indian mythology and three books are published on the basis of this TV series and his interactions. He introduces the viewers to the world of Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu and other deities. He reinterprets myths from famous folktales and classics and discovers the mysterious nature of humans. He elucidates and clarifies on the major cause behind taboo practices and Indian traditions in this day and age. Indians praise the persona of lords and goddesses when they are considered mortal beings.

Retelling myths is practiced a lot in Indian folklore. Basically, it is about telling a new variant of story differently and it often updates and gives a new perception towards mythology. Pattanaik basically retells the tales of legendary Indian epics and brings repressed views and characters ahead in that. He analyzes, contrasts, compares, and criticizes those characters to reveal a lot about Indian society and culture.

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