Reimagining Myth through Folklore: Adaptation of Ancient Narratives in Amruta Patil's *Adiparva:Churning of the Ocean*

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Introduction

Folklore and mythology are two facets of the same coin with overlapping features but they serve different cultural functions. Mythology is often viewed as a supremely authoritative, sacred, account of creation and the deeds of the divine archetypes. They depict moral codes of conduct, the beginning of existence, and manifestation of deities. On the other hand, folklore is flexible and grows from within the communities and thrives on the oral traditions. In barest terms, folklore comprises traditional beliefs, customs, rituals, songs, proverbs, paintings, tales and dances passed down orally through generations and preserved among a people. Folklore and mythology deeply imbricate and shape both collective memory and cultural identity. Therefore, their inter-connectedness is of vital importance.

India is known for its cultural richness and Indian folklore consists katha (narratives), lokgeet (folk songs), lok kathayein (folk tales), khand kathas (short epic fragments), riddles, proverbs and paintings such as *madhubani, patua, gond, warli* and many more. While these traditions vary geographically, their objectives remain more or less the same: to preserve cultural values, amuse, and teach moral and spiritual lessons. As such, the folklore also functions as a channel of passing on the traditional wisdom. In this role, even the epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, along with the folktales of the *Jataka*, the *Panchatantra*, and the *Hitopadesha* have also historically been instrumental. Their essential narratives get adapted from time to time to suit the changing times.

One new form of this adaptation is the graphic novels that combine visual arts with the narrative art. For instance, *Sita's Ramayana* (2011) by Samhita Arni brings together folklore and lively *patua* scroll paintings to refashion the epic. Likewise, *Bhimayana* (2011) by Srividya Natarajan employs the traditional Gond style of painting to depict the autobiography of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. *River of Stories* (2022) by Orijit Sen combines the Indian traditions of oral storytelling with the comics form to depict cultural myths, demonstrating the potential of comics to be both ancient and modern at the same time. Another text to this is *Adiparva: Churning of the Ocean* by Amruta Patil.

The visual rendering opens of vistas of re-interpretation of the epic. The novel focuses on events from the *Mahabharata* which ranges from the start of creation to the birth of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Such an approach allows for folklore hierarchies to be questioned, and for ancient accounts to be chronicled in a more innovative manner. While *Adiparva* reinterprets some familiar histories, they tend to highlight the moral issues, the contexts as well the audiences through a different lens altogether.

Ganga as the Sutradhaar: The Voice of Change and Connectivity

In the novel, Amruta Patil makes Ganga, the river goddess as the *sutradhaar* or the organizing principle of the web of tales. This is in line with the tradition narrative repertoire responsible for undisrupted continuity of the orature. Ganga is not only a mythic character but indeed an embodied voice that alternates between an authoritative speech and an easy-going talk, which reveals the coexistence of legend and tradition. This way, the novel places itself in the continuum of the orally narrated legends with an emphasis, signalling that the stories have been told and retold over generations, where the boundaries of myth and tradition are blurred.

Ganga as a narrative device designed to connect different episodes mentally and thematically serves a dual function. On the one hand, her voice has the divine force of muses' prophecy; on the other, it brings out

her human vulnerability as a woman. She tells her own story as her journey begins in the heavens, travels through Shiva's realms, and then enters the mortal world, becomes a symbol for the oral tradition's enduring power. The story takes place in a frame narrative, enabling readers to delve deeper into the *Mahabharata*'s broad fabric than the traditional emphasis on the Kuru-Pandava conflict. The *sutradhaar's* position is further complicated by the variety of opposing voices among the listeners, which creates dialectic for the audience.

By using informal language and establishing a conversational tone, the dialogue patterns in *AdiParva* greatly enhance the oral storytelling ambiance and encourage a communal narrative experience. Moreover, the phenomenon of direct address, where characters speak to the audience in the second person, establishes a direct engagement.

Chronological Structure: Oral Tradition Dispersed across Time

Adiparva has an episodic structure, where each tale, whether concerning cosmic disputes or family quibbles, is interconnected and contributes to the larger and unified discussion of creation, conflict, and destiny. Patil blends these episodes of philosophical inquiries and earthly tragedies in the *Mahabharata*'s founding events.

A foundational story highlights the cosmic dispute of the ultimate creator, be it Shiva, Brahma, or Vishnu, symbolizing the unity and diversity in creation. The cyclical narrative of life as depicted in the tale of samudra manthan, or ocean churning introduces themes of betrayal, cooperation, and power, and reflects the larger cosmic conflict.

The story of Kadru and Vinata, the mothers of birds and snakes, makes this narrative even better. The story of Garud and Anant is very similar to this one. Their fight for power leads to curses that affect the fates of their children. Anant, who was cursed to carry the weight of the universe, stands for perseverance, and Garud, who was born to free his mother Vinata from slavery, stands for freedom. These stories serve as a backdrop for the serpents' ongoing marginalization, which recurs in the

later episode of Janamejaya's serpent sacrifice, in addition to echoing the idea of balance—between servitude and freedom, effort and fate.

The sequence on the genealogy of the Kuru dynasty makes the interconnectedness of these episodes more evident. Satyavati's story of a poor fisherman woman eventually becoming the queen mother carries elements of transformation and empowerment that inspires her son Shantanu's story including his marriage with Ganga. The couple had a son Bhisma who vowed to stay celibate and loyal to the Kuru lineage, shaping the history of the Kuru dynasty.

In Shakuntala's tale, her marriage with King Dushyanta and the birth of Bharata, who is the eponymous ancestor of the dynasty's royal line, signify the fusion of heavenly and earthly heritage. These family lines come together in the stories of Pandu and Dhritarashtra who were wed and whose children-the Pandavas and the Kauravas- later became embroiled in the central conflict of the *Mahabharata*.

One of the features of oral traditions is this disjointed but integrated framework. In the traditional kathavachan (a storytelling session), the narrators frequently roam from one story to another using a character or a theme to link all the stories, making it easy for them to flow as one. This is such that the audience is able to listen to the stories separately and within the context of other stories. The novel, successfully uses this style that is percussive and oral in essence.

Adaptability and Change in Oral Traditions

Oral narratives are dynamic and constantly evolving with time as voiced by the storyteller, their listeners and the broader social context. *Adiparva*, with its modern retellings of old tales, showcases the continued relevance of these traditional narratives.

The duality within Ganga herself allows her to have a different approach of interpreting myths throughout history. For instance, while most traditions view the *asurs* as villains in the *samudra manthan*, Ganga argues that they were only seeking their rightful part of the *amrit*, and thus were justified in their actions. Such conclusions not only dismiss

the binary of evil versus good but also advance the discourse on the nature of power, its relation to evil, and vice versa, using folklore as the primary resource. For instance, when the *asurs* were approached to participate in the *samudra manthan* to yield *amrit*, they kept their egos aside and worked together with the devas but when the time came for distribution of *amrit*, they were wrongfully deceived only in the pretext that their intent was wrong.*"*There was no one the *asurs* abhorred more than the *devas*, but when Indra approached the *asur* king Vali, he found the *asurs* quite amenable. . . . Just like the serpents,the *asurs* got nothing but deception in return for their effort" (86, 94). This distinctly indicates the ability of oral traditions to alter the already prevalent ones instead of being overpowered by them.

Myth as Folklore: Redefining Boundaries

In most cases, where people tend to compartmentalize several disciplines into subfields, mythology and folklore fall into distinctive categories. Attributing the title 'authoritative' and 'sacred' to mythology which is derived from sacred books and archaic practices, while folklore is dubbed as 'everyday' and 'fluid' as it is passed down in oral form and regards societal practices. *Adiparva* however, dismisses that assumption by using a folkloric approach to the mythological events that reshapes myth as a current and more adaptable tradition.

Patil intertwines what is folklore with what is myth and considers both as sources of cultural survival with universal themes of power, morality and identity as appears in the illustrations of common themes such as libels, treachery's, or vendettas. Using these themes, Patil makes these ancient myths seem more useful and practical to the social principle of folklore.

Curses and Deceptions: Catalysts of Transformation

To curse and to deceive appear frequently in many folktales and sometimes form the most important point around which a conflict or some sort of change happens. The novel too engages these themes to deal with issues relating to trust, betrayal, and man's mistakes.

The curse bestowed by Kadru upon her children, the serpents, stands out in this regard. When the serpents refuse to assist her in outwitting her sister, Kadru loses her temper and curses them that they will perish in the snake sacrifice of Janamejaya. This episode, which is concerned with a myth, has been given a sense of folklore in its style of narration.

In the same way, *samudra manthan* (churning of the ocean) introduces the element of deception with regards to Mohini, an incarnation of Vishnu. Mohini's charms and guile causes the devas to get hold of the *amrit*(the nectar of immortality) while the *asurs* are left with nothing. In the popular mythology, this deed is one of ruse and the divine encouragement intercession. However, through the eyes of Patil an emphasis in retelling through the folklore form helps underscore the moral grayness of the deed. The fact that the *asurs* were not included in this narrative was not a gory story of good battling evil but a poignant tale of betrayal, shaming and trust erosion which is the concern of the popular folklore.

The fact that the *asurs* do not have access to the *amrit* fits well with folklore's compassion for the oppressed. Many folk epics and songs are written focusing on the power relations and the wrongdoings that make contact with those who have been pushed outside the margins. Patil is able to change the way this episode has always been told which is of a moral defeat and instead explains it as an act of oppression against the *asurs* and so more fitting to the spirit of folklore.

Adiparva must be praised especially for reconstructing the images of *asurs* and serpents that have been painted previously unfavourably. These are antagonistical characters in the *asur* and serpents cosmology whose representations typically connote chaos, greed, and destruction. It is however, Patil's depiction of these existing forms and modification of established hierarchies that makes them instead reveal extraordinary struggles and virtues.

Family Dynamics: Kinship as a Source of Harmony and Discord

Adiparva explores common themes of folklore as rivalries, sacrifices, and betrayals in episodes such as the contest between Vinata and Kadru,

the socio-political history of Yayati and his grandson Puru, and the rival claims within the Kuru's clan.

A common thread in myths and folklore is that of rivalry among siblings to overturn one another's supremacy, a perfect example of which is the story of Vinata and Kadru. The expulsion of Vinata by Kadru and the subsequent curse placed by the former on her serpent children for being disobedient serve as examples of how the family can have a strained relationship and the damage caused by it over time. These conflicts have been depicted in a more serious manner in the folklore as a means of teaching the masses about the dangers of jealousy, selfishness and ambition while at the same time painting a delicate picture of the parental bonds.

The same holds true in the case of the interlude between Yayati and Puru across ages, showcasing another theme of shifting relations between children and parents. Yayati loses strength in his father's words when he instructs his son Puru to ulfil his every wish, showing him neglect as well. It was Puru's sacrifice in the end which has undoubtedly raised concerns over authority and devotion in the younger generation.

Role of Women in Folklore

Folktales are often associated with women as they are passed down from mothers and grandmothers, and also feature strong, powerful female characters, promoting women's self-expression. This mythological retelling similarly portrays female figures like Shakuntala, Amba and Ganga as active agents in the conflicts and instrumental in advancing tales through decisions made.

Ganga, as the *sutradhaar* possesses the feminine mystique as well as the authority that female deities have and in essaying both the roles, she restores the myth on various levels. Her sympathy for the asuras brings out newer sensitivity to the traditional stories. Women are depicted as champions of appropriation and fortitude, as we see in Shakuntala's story which consists of love, abandonment, and reconciliation motifs. Although she was wronged by her lover, King Dushyanta, she shakes

off cliché and proclaims dominion where her son, Bharata stands as an inheritor. As against that, Amba's character challenges gender roles. Amba's absence of agency and having been wronged by Bhishma metamorphoses and manifests Amba as a vengeful icon. Amba's resistance followed by transformation complies with the line of folklore which depicts woman as heroes with emotions as opposed to a damsel waiting for a prince. Patil deliberately chooses these characters and a woman narrator to signify the bigger roles women play in the course of events rather than serving as mere backgrounds to the patriarchal narratives.

Reinterpreting Folklore through Graphic Visuals

Patil utilizes the graphic novel medium to reimagine the myths and tell the stories from a more folklorist view bearing relations of equilibrium, struggle and change. The illustrations and techniques she uses perturb the norms and boundaries and make the audience empathize with characters at a deeper and social level .This is why, for example, the *asurs* who have become the villains in most classical sources of literature, become in this graphic form more humane with colours in their faces and more detailing in their expressions. This reimagining visually is in sync with folklores practice of presenting outcastes as being more than simply a baddie in the story.

In the same manner, the appearance of Mohini during *samudra manthan* proves that she was not simply a pawn of the gods but had her own interests while hinting that her appearance was also deceptive. The novel depicts this through images using light and shadow in conflicting ways to illustrate the two regal soliloquies reflecting the idea of moral ambiguity, a common theme in the folklore.

Conclusion

Adiparva blends myths and folklore as consistent modules which are vital in sustaining culture in a society. Through oral retellings and visual drawings, Patil transforms orthodox stories and displaces well established practices and oppositional dualisms which have over the years

characterised such narratives. The interplay of myth, folklore and the graphic medium proves the point that these stories within contemporary society and practice are still significant, yet deeply historical. Therefore, *Adiparva* not only serves in promoting the knowledge about Indian culture elements, but it also illustrates the growing development of narration that such kinds of expressions are not static but creative and flourishing in the face of changes.

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