A Perusal of Indian Mythological Television Narratives

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Abstract

Television as a visual narrative becomes the comprehensive exposition of popular culture. The role of mythology in constructing the contemporary Indian social background through popular television narratives has by now gathered momentum. They serve as an appropriate medium that imposes domestic and cultural consciousness on its popular audience. The mythological stories it retells and the ways in which it is filmed marks the current happenings and cultural traits of the society. The potential of mythological television narratives to produce meaning has strengthened ideological values by reinforcing prevailing concepts and beliefs in society. This research paper probes into how retold Indian mythological narratives compose an exceptionally new form of reality that goes hand in hand with each one's life and experience.

Keywords: Television narratives, Mythology, Popular culture

Television narratives have evolved as a result of the progressive transformation in storytelling techniques and narrative structures that could be found in literature and media. Television as a visual narrative becomes the comprehensive exposition of popular culture. Popular television narratives follow definite standards when it comes to storytelling. With the aid of psychologically defined characters that reflect the inner psyche of the everyday people, the loosely structured narrative plot and story threads, both television series and films share some elements in common. All these basic and critical elements set out to deal with some possible events with intellectual coherence, skilful tactics and practical rationality.

When it comes to mythological television narratives, the role of mythology in constructing the contemporary Indian social background through popular television narratives has even spread to every nook and corner of the world. This narrative strategy has now gathered attention of a wide array of heterogeneous and multicultural audience with its unique plot structure enabling Indian popular television narrative to base its narrative background on the traditional Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

Indian mythology has widely taken its different tellings in television narratives in the form of short films, feature films, international co-productions, animated feature films, animated series, performed series in regional languages, performed films and so on. Targeting mainly on mythological stories and their related shows, television narratives had gained wide popularity in serving as an appropriate medium that imposes domestic and cultural consciousness on its popular audience. Being a self-reflective medium that mirrors the daily affairs, subject matters, practical limits, social constraints, domestic norms, political conventions, religious struggles, behavioural goals and progressive elements,

the visual narratives telecasted through television cross borders of national economy. Popular films and television series…

tell stories in an entertaining, easily comprehensible fashion. They seem simple, yet often the audience must keep track of several characters, multiple plot lines, motifs, and thematic meanings. Television viewers often face the additional challenge of frequent interruptions – for commercials, for week-long gaps between episodes, and even for stretches of time between seasons. Yet they manage to keep track of not only a single long-running narrative, but often several simultaneously (Thompson, ix).

Filming mythological narratives is a powerful tool that paves the way for cultural transformation. Each television narrative that employs epics, lores, legends and mythologies becomes a replica of underlying elements of socio political and cultural backgrounds. Often it acts as a medium to rethink and revise through graphics, animations, casts and costumes. The prime time of television is now at the brim of picking up steam in these animated and performed series on mythical characters, legends, gods their family and so on. The mythological stories it retells and the ways in which it is filmed marks the current happenings and cultural traits of the society. As a narrative strategy, television narratives are performed to appeal to the audience.

Targeting an audience of varied age group, culture and language, these new versions have gathered a greater appeal by its mass viewers and they are the living evidences for the culture, form, society and age in which they are reframed. Irrespective of where the spectators are based, these mythical television narratives are available in any language and culture. They were simultaneously appealing to both regional and religious audience. For the special attention and appreciation, many newly added stories were also incorporated during the casting of the narratives.

Efforts have also been taken to maintain and recapture the very essence and morale of such mythological stories. In addition, these latest modern gods and legends have marked their entry into the big budget and glamorous budgets and many of the channels got benefited with extravagant budgets due to its wide acceptance and mass popularity. As a result, these far reaching stories could mark their own space in the television market by facilitating its dubbings in multiple languages. By now, they are also attempting to bring out cultural narration incorporating each culture's beliefs, traits and so on. Apart from this, each story grows with its new forms. In spite of these stories' attempt to hoard collections, they also aim for a critical reading to have a different experience.

The reason behind the commerciality of mythological television shows over literary mythological narratives is simply because of the dual experience of the interlaced video and the corresponding audio it provides. Mythological characters, gods, goddesses, anti-gods and the like have been overpowering the entire television shows since 1987. This is just due to people's endearment and affinity towards gods and the stories related to them. Besides, mythological stories have been passed on by means of performing arts such as dance, theatre and musical theatre, historical manuscripts, musical compositions, Kathakali and so on.

The potential of mythological television narratives to produce meaning has strengthened ideological values by reinforcing prevailing concepts and beliefs in society. The importance of television narratives in the socialization process has led to an investigation into how a specific behavior might be perpetuated in society by the manner it is maintained in television narratives. The impact of television shows on society has been represented in such a way that people might mistakenly believe that the activities depicted on television are natural and normal, and they may become ideologically enslaved to a pattern of conduct seen frequently on television.

Television is seen as realistic because it reproduces a dominant sense of reality through the conventions it contains which viewers are able to recognize and from which they are able to construct meaning (Fiske, 21).

These narratives also expose the prevailing concerns such as social as well as political injustices, gender inequalities, hierarchical discriminations, cultural distortions, lost hegemony, individual disharmonies, caste-class riots, gender struggles, sexuality, violence, atrocities, revolts, moral disintegrations and so on. The growth of mythological stories into television narratives are based on certain elementary theoretical and methodological frameworks apart from its commercial end of enhancing entertainment. Most of the retold narratives compose an exceptionally new form of reality that goes hand in hand with each one's life and experience. It is the situation where one tells the story of another or at times their life as a whole without altering the course of action, but with a different dimension of socio cultural environment. It also incorporates newly established ideologies and mind-sets.

Television narratives that focus mainly on mythology present essential concerns regarding social relations, power and practices. Each telling is understood by means of its difference with each other and the source text. The production of meaning is also thus based on this difference in depicting human lives. It is through this interplay of the differences that each construct is being created. These already created differences get re-constructed by means of the socio cultural contexts in which it is contained. It is neither an analysis, nor a method nor a critique. Instead it is a form of comprehension, interpretation and understanding based on one's perception.

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