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## The Monstrous Sublime: A Postmodern Deconstruction of Mythology and Cultural Identity in Amish Tripathi's Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta

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### Abstract

Amish Tripathi's Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta (2019) has made significant changes in the familiar portrayal of Raavan, the King of Lanka. He is a complex character with a mix of emotions. Tripathi brings out all of Raavan's untold sides. He is neither a good nor a bad person. The portrayal of Raavan throughout this series contrasts with the traditional or fixed. The paper examines the concept of *différance* by Jacques Derrida, the myths as analyzed by Roland Barthes, and the myths as criticized by Jean-François Lyotard. It states that the novel is a breakthrough as the displaced Other has the opportunity to reclaim authority over the definite notions of good and evil. As the study suggests, the novel is a turning point where the displaced Other can take back control of the stasis of the conventional moral discourses.

**Key-word** Postmodernism, Deconstruction, Amish Tripathi, Raavan, Cultural Identity, Monstrous Sublime.

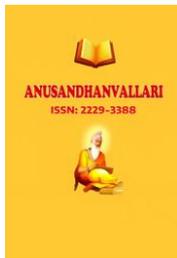
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### Introduction

The novel Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta by Amish Tripathi, gives a rich source of postmodern inquiry, especially when it is considered through the theoretical instrument of the monstrous sublime. The story reinvents Raavan, traditionally translated as a dark and evil character in the Hindu mythology, as a complex and multidimensional character whose identity challenges and undermines the cultural traditions and moral dichotomies.

The concept of the monstrous sublime which is a combination of awe and horror fits perfectly on the description by Tripathi. He describes Raavan as a brilliant man, a man who was erroneous by nature and a tragic hero: a man whose ambition, intellect, and physical abilities were the reasons to admire him, but whose darker desires were the reasons to be frightened and feel morally uncomfortable. This internal duality is a systematic deconstruction of the mythological story of Raavan portraying him not as a one-dimensional villain, but as a creation of his contextual environment, self-determination, and sociocultural identity. The postmodern paradigm thus breaks the traditional hero versus villain dichotomy and promotes review of the cultural discourses that shape the mythological modes of interpretation.

Furthermore, the cultural identity is questioned in the text through a chronological account of the path of Raavan who rejects the existing social norms and dictums. His image is a symbol of opposition to established power, hence, a place of worship and criticism. By way of this story, Tripathi is mercilessly satirizing the rigidity of cultural archetypes and the constant flux of identity as a subjective construct in the mythical realm. This strategy is close to the postmodern doctrines that anticipate fragmentation and plurality of truth.



The characterisation of Raavan by Tripathi has been subject to analysis of the concepts of the hybridity and of the liminality of Homi K. Bhabha as developed in his work *The Location of Culture*. Raavan exists in a mediocre middle-ground of neither good nor evil, and is thus disrupting traditional plots and creating new frames of references in cultural oracy. Similarly, the theory of power/knowledge by Michel Foucault can be used to evaluate the use of mythology as a means of maintaining social orders, and to evaluate how Raavan is challenging these hegemonic orders.

The Ramayana has been used to represent the Grand Narrative of India and has provided a very distinct moral opposition of Dharma (order) and Adharma (chaos). Such broad explanations have growingly become unbelievable in the postmodern period (Lyotard 79). The role in this change is taken by the game, Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta, which does not show the main antagonist as a demon, but rather as someone who can be characterized as a monstrous sublime: he is characterized by unusual insight and intense suffering. In this paper, Tripathi makes use of Barthes and Derrida to deconstruct the cultural identity of Raavan, to change him into a one-dimensional mythic image, rather one, to become a dynamic, postmodern text.

"I don't care about your Dharma. Your Dharma let my mother suffer. Your Dharma looked away when we were hungry. My Dharma is my brother, my people, and my vengeance." (Tripathi 156)

### **Barthesian Myth -Stripping**

Roland Barthes considers mythology to be a second-order semiology system in *Mythologies* which vaporizes a subject of its history in order to transform it into a symbol (114). Ever since, the figure of Raavan is being stripped of any sophistication, it just acts as a caution to ego. Tripathi takes the reverse of this process by making the demon king re-historicized.

He tells us of the early years of Raavan, as a Naga boy when he was a social reject, when he sees his mother, Kaikesi, being harshly abused. This plot twist dissolves the mythology of the ten headed monster, and materializes the life of marginalized childhood. Tripathi slays the conventional authorial purpose of the epic by providing Raavan with a backstory one of traumatic childhood, intellectual hunger. Only the space came to keep the modern reader to the revisited hero of Tripathi, as Barthes wrote in *The Death of the Author*, creates the meaning of the concept Raavan without referring to the ancient scriptures (148).

### **Deconstruction Derridean The Aporia of the Villain.**

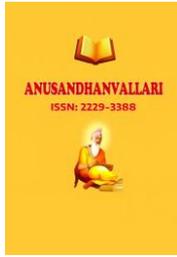
Deconstruction by Jacques Derrida reveals the internal contradiction or the aporias in a text. Conventional interpretations of the Ramayana make use of a dichotomy in which Rama is interpreted as Presence/Light, and Raavan is interpreted as Absence/ Darkness. Tripathi breaks this hierarchy, however, by demonstrating that the chaos of Raavan is a direct reaction to an exclusionary, corrupt hierarchy.

There is a major state of aporia when Raavan mourns the death of Vedavati. His sorrow is almost heroic but it strikes a lightning fire of rage that is admittedly villainous. This conflict does not allow the reader to make one ethical decision. Raavan is a kind of trace (Derrida 62) of a hero and a monster, he is named by difference, meaning that is never presented embodied in the comprehensive label of an enemy.

"The world is not for the weak, Kumbhakarna. It is for the strong. The weak only exist to be used by the strong, or to be protected by them. There is no in-between." (Tripathi 114)

### **Monstrous Sublime: Charisma and Cruelty.**

Tripathi makes the most of Raavan with aesthetic known as Monstrous Sublime. The sublime is a manifestation of awe and terror as written by Edmund Burke. The intellectual genius of Raavan is sublime and he is a polymath, a master of the Rudra Veena, a scientist. but this greatness is inseparable with his acts of violence.



The sublime which is postmodern can be represented by the destruction of the Mithila gates. Raavan is not pursuing virtue in order to win a bride, he is showing overpowering strength in the use of the forbidden Asura-astra. The fact that it surpasses all human measure makes this act sublime as it elicits a Burkean terror that places characters into aesthetic hesitation; this action also compels the readers. He is not just a monster as he knows his monstrosity and is not merely a monster by an ethical classification. "He played like a man possessed. It was not music; it was a storm. It was the sound of a god screaming in pain, and a demon laughing in triumph." (Tripathi 203)

### **The Other and Cultural Identity.**

The aspect of identity in the text by Tripathi is not a hereditary dogma but an aspect of performativity (Butler 25). The created identity of Raavan is social marginalization in terms of a Naga.

### **The Naga as the other**

Nagas are the Derridean other as the Other in the novel, the definition of the exclusion of which makes up the Center of Aryavarta. The journey by Raavan is aimed at recovering this identity. Instead of embracing, he constructs a counter-civilization in Lanka, overthrown by a land-based structure into a fluid and sea-based trade empire. "They call us Nagas. They call us cursed. But they forget that the serpent is the only creature that can shed its skin and be born again. I will not be born again into their world. I will build a world where the skin doesn't matter, only the teeth do." (Tripathi 342)

### **Hybridity**

Raavan can be considered a bricolage (Derrida 285) - a Brahmin at heart but an Asura at heart. Such hybridity allows him to move across various different cultural worlds without being a part of either of them, and it is a characteristic of a truly postmodern situation. "Gold is not a metal here; it is an idea. It is the idea that a man's worth is decided by his work, not his birth." (Tripathi 412)

### **Conclusion**

With mythology becoming a living thing and not fossilized: The Ravan: Enemy of Aryavarta, people learn that this is what mythology should be and that it can be modified to go in step with the modern day thought process. Tripathi deconstructs the moral stiffenings of the traditional edifice of the Ramayana by using the postmodern ideas of Barthes and Derrida. Raavan becomes a hero of the so-called monstrous sublime one who might be admired, feared, and extremely fragmented. Finally, the novel only hints that cultural identity is a performance, something we have to create in our own world and in which the Grand Narratives of old no longer represent anything steady.

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