



Mythology in Children's Literature: A Narrative Study on Roopa Pai's *Gita*

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Abstract

The function of conveying a culture's myth to its younger generation is a very delicate process. Myth is a mixture of fact and fantasy and it is the duty of an adult reteller to convey the right ideas in a right manner to the children. Creating mythological retellings for children involves a multi-levelled process: filtering the myth to make it child-appropriate, structuring it in an attractive format and delivering a content relatable for the kids. Roopa Pai, an Indian writer for children, came out with a book titled *Gita: For Children* (2015), which retells the *Bhagvad Gita* of the *Mahabharata*. The *Bhagvad Gita*, being a book of complex philosophies, is difficult enough to be explained to adults. Hence, it takes a deeper understanding of the source text and also the psyche of children to come out with a work like that. The objective of this paper is to analyse the narrative technique that Pai has followed in *Gita: For Children* in order to break down a culture's mythology into a digestible form for the younger generation. The methodology for the study would be a narrative analysis of the primary text. It was identified from the study that Pai constructs a three-layered structure in the text: a) a background insight into the story, where she describes the context and adds additional information on elements seen in the story b) the narration of the story c) explaining the facts of the story with examples relatable for the children. This third structure involves a concept called Applied Mythology. It explains how myth is applicable in the contemporary world. It is also observed that there are three parallel conversations throughout the text: a) the one between Krishna and Arjuna b) the one between Sanjaya and Dritarashtra and c) the one between Pai and her readers. In this third category, Pai uses the technique called 'breaking the fourth wall'. Here, Pai comes out of her veil as a distant narrator and directly talks to her target audience, the children. While most authors claim it is more difficult to write for children than for adults, this study shall help understand the different narrative strategies that Pai employs in the text to simplify complex philosophies of life for children.

Keywords: Mythological Retelling, Children's literature, Narrative Techniques, Breaking the Fourth Wall, Applied Mythology

1. Introduction

1.1 Children's Literature in Indian Writing in English

Writing for children is a skill that not many are blessed with. In Indian Writing in English, some of the earliest works of Children's Literature are by writers like Rabindranath Tagore, his nephew Abanindranath Tagore, Sukumar Ray, Premchand, etc. Sukumar Ray's father Upendrakishore launched a children's magazine named *Sandesh* in 1913. Later on, India has seen writers like R. K. Narayan who wrote both for adults as well as children. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* makes an impact on every Indian child even today. Only later did writers who wrote exclusively for children increase, as English medium schools sprouted up all over India, and as children of Indian homes developed a reading habit.

Today, children's writing can be considered a genre by itself, with an number of books published under its wings. However, the place held by Enid Blyton and Nancy Drew fifteen years back is only replaced by Rick Riordan and J. K. Rowling today. Shobha Vishwanath, the publishing director of *Karadi Tales*, observes that in spite of the presence of numerous books, writers and publishing houses coming up exclusively for developing Children's Literature in India, Indian children prefer western writing to Indian writing in English and they show much less preference for regional Indian literature. Hence, she believes that Children's Literature in India is still at its "nascent stage" and yet to be developed (Vishwanath, 2014). Writers like Narayan, Ruskin Bond and Sudha Moorthy are those very few Indian writers who can be found in Indian children's bookshelves today.

Children's writing is distinct from works written for audience of other ages because of its unique features: the plot and the language are more age-appropriate here. The language is direct and much simpler with short sentences. Colourful illustrations and bigger fonts are used to attract the children's attention and interest. Children's literature largely holds books that preach moral values and good habits to the children. If not practical life-lesson teaching books, then it is fantasy. There are different kinds of books for different phases of childhood. For children of the age group three to eight, bed time stories, mostly fantastic short stories, are read out. For children between the age of eight and twelve, parents buy didactic folk tales. From thirteen to fifteen, young adult fictions are much preferred (even though 'young adult' genre is not usually considered a part of children's literature). Young adult fictions have distinct features and mostly involve friendship and adventure. This is a vague classification for basic understanding, because no child of any age can be said to have a particular preference for sure. A girl of fifteen could be into serious non-fictions and a boy of twelve could be into mysteries and science fictions. Preferences vary according to every individual and their environment.

Popular children's writers include Enid Blyton, Nancy Drew, Franklin Dixon, Agatha Christie, J. K. Rowling, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, etc. Fun, fantasy and suspense are what attract children the most. Though such books cause thrill, excitement and satisfaction, works like *Akbar and Birbal*, *Tenali Raman*, *Vikram and Vedaal*, *Mullah Stories* and *The Panchatantra* affect the way a child thinks and behaves. Recent writers of children's literature are efficient at combining all these factors together. Mythology is one such subject that lets a writer deliver all these essentials in one plot.

1.2 Indian Mythological Retellings for Children

Children's literature and animated television series are great means to impart the knowledge of ancient stories to the children of this generation. Earlier, mythology was introduced to children orally by the elders in the family. Many decades back, children would have got the opportunity to see street plays depicting scenes from works called as the two great epics of India. Today, in a society where our lifestyle (thoughts, beliefs and actions) is very

much removed from our ancient culture, the children's attention is grasped through illustrated comics and animations, to enlighten them about the legends of their region.

1.2.1 Retellings in Literature

Even though Children's Literature as a genre opened up as early as the time British missionaries entered India, mythological retellings for the children came up at a much later stage, mainly in the form of comics and graphic novels. From 1969, Amar Chitra Katha published books popular for retelling mythology to children through their graphic novels.

In recent years, works of Pattanaik, Roopa Pai, Anu Kumar, etc., gained popularity in this genre. *Fun in Devlok Omnibus* by Devdutt Pattanaik was published in 2014. It is a series of six tales with illustrations by Vishal Tandon, making mythology much more interesting for budding readers. Anu Kumar's *The Adventures of Atisa* and *Mythquest* series are well-acclaimed works. Pattanaik, Pai and Kumar write both for adults as well as children. A common remark made by most writers is that it is more challenging to write for children than adults.

Mythology holds the first ever stories (written and told) of any culture. So, not just the mythological fictions, any fiction ever written shall have a resemblance to some story from mythology.

In the introduction to his translation of the *Ramayana*, C. Rajagopalachari comments on the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in the following manner, "The characters and incidents of these two itihisas have come to be the raw material for the works of numerous poets and saints that came later to write dramas and sing poems and hymns to keep this nation in the straight path" (1957, p. 9).

A great part of Indian mythology is from the two Sanskrit epics called the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Apart from these, in Tamil there are multiple written sources like the *Periya Puranam*, *Silapadikaram*, *Thiruvilayadal Puranam*, etc. *The Panchatantra Tales* and *Jataka Tales* are also a part of Indian mythology. Since India is celebrated for its diversity, it is apparent that it shall hold a large body of myths contributed by societies of different regions, languages, traditions and professions.

As found in "Rajaji: A Life: 'Fall' 1935-37", in a letter to Mahadev Desai, C. Rajagopalachari who has translated the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* into Tamil and English observes that

"I believe with Bapu [Gandhiji] that most of our mythological stories are allegories, including the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Only I don't believe in the attempts sometimes made to weave a systematic allegory running throughout a book. I think it is a wild collection of isolated and valuable allegories." (2004, p. 80)

He also comments in his *Mahabharata* that

"In the moving history of our land, from time immemorial great minds have been formed and nourished and touched to heroic deeds by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In most Indian homes, children formerly learnt these immortal stories as they learnt their mother-tongue—at the mother's knee; and the sweetness and sorrows of Sita and Draupadi, the heroic fortitude of Rama and Arjuna and the loving fidelity of Lakshmana and Hanuman became the stuff of their young philosophy of life." (1958, p. 3)

It is a known fact that Indian mythology is often referred to as Hindu Mythology. It is mainly because Indian mythology is filled with stories of Hindu gods, devotees, rituals and beliefs. However, Pattanaik and a few other historians observe that the concept of 'Hinduism' itself was created by the colonisers of India in a much later period, for their own convenience. Struggling to understand the much complex and oldest philosophy of India, the colonisers had categorised all non-muslims as Hindus and their beliefs and practices as Hinduism or Hindu religion (2003, p. 2-3) And so, most of the Indian mythological texts were subjected to their editions and interpretations, in their attempts to understand the Indian mythology that obviously sounded absurd, incredible and difficult for those people, whose culture, values, beliefs, language and practices are much different from that of the Indians. Even if it were not for their interference, Pattanaik believes that the Indian Mythology that we know today is not exactly the same as the one that existed centuries ago. Another fact to be remembered is that Hindu myth is not the only component of Indian mythology. It includes myths of other religions like Jainism and Buddhism.

It is to be noted that many myths of Indian mythology are proved to be historical and scientific facts. Indian mythology mentions *Pushpak Vimanam* [one of the earliest models of an aircraft]; Indian mythology talks of medicine, astrology, astronomy, chemistry, warfare, administration and what not.

1.2.2 Animated Retellings

There is a question of what comprises Children's Literature. When surveys are conducted, even colouring books, puzzle books and children's academic textbooks are included under the umbrella term of Children's Literature. In terms of children's narratives, animations made for children are also to be considered.

Animated movies are largely loved by children and a few adults as well. Apart from Children's literature, even these animations retell mythology for children. In India, such kinds of animations are many in number. For example, *My friend Ganesha*, *Jai Hanuman*, *Chotta Bheem* and *Little Krishna* are the most popular ones telecasted. Among these retellings, some convey the mythological stories, while some just make use of the mythical figures as a feature to entertain the children.

2. The *Bhagvad Gita*: A Brief Introduction

In Kurukshetra, the Bharata cousins Pandavas and Kauravas are about to battle against each other for the throne of Hastinapur. This battle is often referred to as the Dharmayuddha/the battle of righteousness. When the battle is about to begin, Arjuna has second thoughts. On the other side of the battle line are his respectful teacher Guru Dronacharya and revered relatives like Pitamah Bhishma, and the Kauravas, who no matter what, are his own cousins. Arjuna feels that it is unrighteous to battle and kill his own kith and kin. That is when his friend, guide and charioteer Krishna convinces Arjuna to go forward, since it was Arjuna's responsibility to do so. Krishna has to make a really long speech in order to convince Arjuna and this speech is what is referred to as The *Bhagvad Gita* or The Song of the Lord. This particular section of the epic alone is published in many places, and is considered as one of the holy texts by the Hindus and is translated into many languages. Till date, scholars keep attempting to paraphrase every *shloka* [verse] of *The Bhagavad Gita* (or the *Gita* in short). Many people in India read it regularly and refer to it in times of trouble for guidance.

The *Bhagvad Gita* is found in the 6th Parva (chapter), the Bhishma Parva, of the *Mahabharata*, which is believed to be composed around the second century BCE. The *Gita* has

eighteen chapters, with seven hundred verses on a whole. The authorship of the whole epic is apparently under debate. It is believed that Lord Krishna himself uttered the very lines of the *Gita* and that the entire epic was written by Lord Ganesh years later, as narrated by Sage Vyasa. Some critics fail to believe that such a spectacular work can be written by a single person and state that the *Mahabharata* including the *Gita* must have been written by many different writers. Some believe that the core of the text might have been created by Vyasa, while it assimilated many additions over the years. The *Mahabharata* was said to have been presented orally in the court of King Janamejaya by poet Vyasampayana. Scholars say that not just the creator, it is also

“difficult to point to a singular, original epic text. Many theorists, including but not limited to Herman Oldenburg, David Shulman, and James Hegarty, point out that the epic text is inherently unstable and endlessly dynamic. In fact, there have been several attempts to organize and annotate a stable version of the epic, many of which have ended in failure...” (Kanjilal, 2007, p. 14)

For believers, the *Mahabharata* did happen and the *Gita* is the word of the lord. There are two factors to justify this: 1) It is impossible to write an epic of such length with such grand characters by a single person all on his own. 2) Archaeologists are finding proofs of instances mentioned in the epic. For example, remnants of the palace of Dwaraka are found under the sea. In the epic, Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas having lost all her sons, curses Krishna that he and his people will perish and that entire Dwaraka will be flooded and destroyed. Hence, there are more chances that it is a record of actual events.

Religion, a very sensitive topic today, is just a way to reach the God. There are many ways to reach God and it does not matter which way one follows. If one ignores the fact that the *Gita* is a religious text and looks at it as a piece of literature that has guided so many people for so long, one might realise that is more of a guide or a counsel than something propagating a religion. The *Gita* discusses the philosophy of life. It explains in its own way how the universe functions and what role we play in it. C. Rajagopalachari, having retold the *Gita* himself, says that the *Gita* is not to be memorised but to be used like a guide. Devdutt Pattanaik says that what Krishna offers in the *Gita* is not merely a motivational talk like everyone presumes, but is a “crisis management.”

3. *Gita: For Children*

3.1 About the Author: Roopa Pai

Roopa Pai studied Computer Engineering, and became a journalist and a writer. She also guides children for walks around the historical places of her city, Bangalore, as a part-time job and passion. She began writing for children also out of passion. Being in constant touch with children during her ‘Bangalore Walks’, makes it easy for her to connect with her target audience to learn their language, ideas and expectations. Her *Taronaut Series* (2009-2013) is India's first original fantasy adventure series written for children in English. The series comprises eight novels, namely *The Quest for the Shyn Emeralds*, *The Riddle of the Lustr Sapphires*, *The Secret of the Sparkl Amethysts*, *The Race for the Glo Rubies*, *The Mystery of the Syntilla Silvers*, *The Key to the Shmir Citrines*, *The Search for the Glytr Turquoises* and *The Magic of the Dazl Corals*. A few of her other works are *What If Earth Stopped Spinning? And 24 Other Mysteries of Science* (2014), *The Gita: For Children* (2015), *So You Want to Know About Economics* (2017), *Ready!: 99 Must-have Skills for the World-Conquering Teenager (and Almost Teenager)* (2017), *The Vedas and Upanishads: For Children* (2019), etc. *Sister Sister*, a Science series written for children by Pai, was translated into eleven

languages in India. She has also written *Mechanic Mumtaz* and *Kaliyuga Sita* for an initiative by the UNICEF called ‘Children for Change’. The titles she gives for her books are unique, abrupt and interesting.

“One must read Roopa's book to delight in how she's able to distil concepts and characters from Indian mythology and cloak them oh-so-cleverly in cool. It's almost like she lives that fantasy life herself,” says *The Hindu*. An avid reader since her childhood, Pai claims that as a child she was largely influenced by the children’s magazine called *Target*:

“Target told Indian stories, but cool and contemporary ones about children like me. Till then I thought only the British had a fun childhood. Target made me realise that I wanted to write Indian stories for Indian children. I wanted to nudge Indian Children to change their perspective, to realise that their childhood in this diverse country was pretty unique and special.” (George, 2019)

In the same interview titled “Roopa Pai and her way with words”, regarding her *Taranaut* series, Pai mentions that:

“All my characters have shades of grey in the series. I wanted children to realise that there are no out and out villains in the world, that even villains have a chance to redeem themselves if they choose to. I was also conscious about breaking stereotypes. For instance, just because Zvala is into fashion and is conscious about her looks, it does not make her a low-IQ person. In fact, she is the brainiest of the group.” (George, 2019)

Pai touches upon various fields like mathematics, economics, history and medicine in her writing, out of which science and mythology occupy an important place in most of her works. Her speciality lies in conveying complex ideas in a simpler manner, which is one of the most required abilities for a children’s writer. Pai won the Children’s Book Trust Award for Science Writing. *Her Gita: For Children* won the Crossword Award for children’s writing in 2016. She was nominated for the Femina Women award in 2017 for her contribution to literature. She has written for the *Deccan Herald*, *Target*, *Travel Trends*, etc.

2.2 About the Text

It is not easy to call *Gita: For Children* a fiction or non-fiction. To decide this, one must clarify whether The *Bhagvad Gita* is a fiction or not, and therefore the *Mahabharata* itself. Not just the *Gita*, the question of whether any book is fictional or non-fictional is debatable. The basic idea exists that fiction refers to something creative while non-fiction is more theoretical and philosophical as opposed to anything imaginary. But, critics like Karl Kroeber and Gerard Genette point out that there is not much difference between a fiction and non-fiction. They say that if the definitions of fiction and non-fiction go by their creativity, then a non-fictional critical work is also creative. The critic uses his creativity to identify and reflect upon something that has not been noticed before. Similarly, a fictional creative work is also a criticism aimed at something. It is a critical reaction to some event in the world, either personal or impersonal.

Gita: For Children is a kind of retelling that can be referred to as ‘Applied Mythology’. Pai takes up one specific episode of the Mahabharat called The *Bhagvad Gita* and explains it in her own way. Though her way of expressing and explaining it is different, she does not make any changes to the original plot. Also, this specific part of *Mahabharata* is more a guide book for the humans, than a story. Hence, in many ways, Roopa Pai’s *Gita: For Children* is a non-fiction.

In a cover story of a monthly magazine named *eShe*, Pai reveals the following about how the idea of introducing the *Gita* to the children came up. Admiring Pai's works, Vatsala Kaul Banerjee, an editor of Hachette India publishing house, requested Pai to write a *Gita* for children. Having never read the *Gita* fully previously, Pai felt she was not the right person to write on the said topic. She was not even sure if the *Gita* had anything to do with children. Only after reading the entire book did she realise that "the *Gita* is a conversation between two best friends. Yes, I can explain that to kids." She also comments on the classic that, "Arjuna is symbolic of the seeker and Krishna of his gut or his psychiatrist" (Kapoor, 2019, p. 24).

After much research and reference, Pai still remained doubtful and asked for the opinion of Bibek Debroy after sending him her manuscript. She was relieved to hear his positive feedback. *Gita: For Children* was first published in July 2015 by Hachette Book Publishing India Pvt Ltd. More than 75,000 copies of the book have been sold so far.

One might think that the *Gita* is unnecessary for a kid to learn for its age, but children always come up with bizarre, complex, philosophical and deep questions and their parents find it mostly difficult to convince them with their answers. Books like these help the children realise the purpose of their lives, without affecting their childhood fun. The *Gita* could aid the parents during such question-answer sessions.

2.3 A Summary of the plot

Before getting into the plot, she gives a brief account of what happens before the war, or rather what leads to the War of Kurukshetra. To make it even briefer, King Pandu leaves the throne of Hastinapur, after being cursed by a sage for killing his (the sage's) wife. His elder brother Dritarashtra who was not given the throne initially because of his blindness, is now made to occupy the throne. His sons, the Kauravas, who are scared that the sons of King Pandu, the Pandavas, will aim for the throne, do their best in keeping the Pandavas away from it in all ways possible. They even go to the extent of insulting the wife of the Pandavas and sending all of them to thirteen years of exile. When they return after their period of exile, they are again denied the throne or any piece of land to rule. In the end, everyone decides to battle for the throne in the battlefield.

Pai mentions that the first version of the epic was actually called as *Jaya*, which was a much smaller version, containing the core of the story in twenty-four thousand shlokas. It was composed by Vyasa for three years and written by Lord Ganesha with his tusk. Vyasa's disciple sage Vaishampayana narrated it to king Janamejaya (the great-grandson of Arjuna). This narration along with the conversation between Vaishampayana and Janamejaya was called *Bharata*. Years later, with several additions Ugrashava Sauti, a bard, had narrated it to a group of sages, and this version is called now as the *Mahabharata*. This version was passed on orally and was first written around 4th century CE. Pai adds that "It is said to be a mix of fact and fiction, a story set against actual historical events that occurred somewhere around the 8th century BCE" (unnumbered page).

The book says that the conversation between Arjuna and Krishna was also listened to by King Dritarashtra and his aide Sanjaya from the Palace of Hastinapur. Sanjaya was blessed by sage Vyasa to see the proceedings of the battle from the palace itself, in order to narrate it to king Dritarashtra.

Pai begins with a prayer that is usually said before reading the *Gita*. She then proceeds to describe the scene in Kurukshetra, where the soldiers on either side are feeling restless and ready for battle. The Kauravas have eleven *Akshauhinis*: "giant battalions comprising chariots,

elephants, horsemen, and foot soldiers” (p. 2). The Pandava army has seven *Akshauhinis*. She enlists the names of the great warriors on both the sides: Duryodhana, Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Vikarna, Ahwatthama, etc., supporting the Kauravas and Bhima; Arjuna, Dhrishtadyumna, Kuntibhoja, Abhimanyu, etc., on the Pandava’s side which had “not only truth and justice but Krishna himself on their side” (p. 4).

Conches are blown on both the sides and Arjuna insists Krishna to ride the chariot to the middle of the field to have a look at those who are in support of Duryodhana. Looking at them, Arjuna realises that he is about to fight and kill his own people: nephews, grandfather, grand-nephews, fathers-in-law, etc., and he is filled with fear. He declares to Krishna that he cannot fight against his friends and family even if they are on the opponent side. He thinks that their decision to wage a war is an utter mistake. He also thinks that if they too behave like the greedy Kauravas, then there will not be any difference between both the groups. He wonders how many children will be orphaned and wives widowed at the end of the war. He decides that it is better to die unarmed in the battle than cause destruction to his own family. Listening to this, Dritarashtra feels hopeful that the war will be stopped once and for all.

Krishna begins to scold Arjuna saying that this is not the time for having such thoughts. But Arjuna is torn between running away from the battle and killing his own people. Then he directly asks Krishna to advise him what to do. He also mentions that unless and until he is completely convinced by Krishna’s words he would not fight in the war. And thus begin Krishna’s guidelines.

Pai says it is good to admit when one does not know what is right, because that is the first step to identify what is right. Arjuna knows that posterity would call him a coward if he withdrew from the battle at that stage. But he isn’t worried about what others might think about him. He is more concerned about what he would think of himself if he ran away from the war. He also does not take any hasty decision to put his mind to temporary peace and turns to Krishna for help. Likewise, in times of adversity, humans can turn to god or the inner voice/conscience for help. To listen to the inner voice, which always guides a man in the right path, one must learn to ignore other negative thoughts. Here, Pai makes a quick comparison with *How to Kill a Mockingbird*, where Atticus, a lawyer, fights in support of a Black man even though his entire town is agitated against his action, just because he wanted to be true to his conscience.

Krishna then consoles Arjuna that no one can really kill anyone. Birth and death are only for the human body, but the Atman (the soul) never dies. And so, Krishna asks him to go forward and fight. Arjuna however says that even if he is about to destroy just their bodies, he would still lose them. That is when Krishna reminds him if that is the case then any way he would lose them all one day or another. *Gita* says that “Matter cannot be created or destroyed; it only changes form,” (p. 31) with respect to Arjuna’s query about death. The concept naturally rings a bell, as one realises that it is nothing other than the Law of Conservation of Matter learnt in Physics (which Pai does not fail to mention here). This is also one valid evidence to substantiate that Science and mythology are not paradoxical. In fact, Indian Science (as noted in Indian mythical texts) is much older than Western Science.

Krishna goes on to remind Arjuna that since he is a Kshatriya it is his duty to battle and defend goodness and justice. And that not every Kshatriya gets such an opportunity. If he dies in battle, he would reach heaven. If he wins, he can conquer the land. So, in all ways this is the right decision for him. He continues and says that there is only one strategy to find contentment in life: “do your duty with single-minded focus and great sincerity, without worrying about the

results of the work” (p. 36), “Men who do this, who think only about the higher purpose of the work and not about the results of the work, Arjuna, are Sthitapragyas – men who are happy in the now, always” (p. 37). Such men always keep their senses under control, because when one gives more attention to his or her senses, the person develops attachment and therefore desire. If the desire is not satisfied, then rises anger, which leads to confusion and therefore a “destruction of intelligence” (p. 38).

Arjuna, a keen listener, longs to learn more and more from Krishna. He does not get convinced that easily and is curious to clear all his doubts. Krishna, without getting tired or fed up, and knowing that Arjuna is a worthy learner, shares with him a lot of insights. At one point, Arjuna realises that Krishna is a form of the God, the Absolute One. At his request Krishna shows him his true form which mesmerises Arjuna beyond words: Krishna appears neither as a male nor a female; he neither has a form nor is formless. He is there in everything and everything is him. Arjuna realises that his own soul is a part of Krishna. He gets to know of the various births Krishna had taken till then to help dharma (righteousness) win. In spite of knowing that he is the Lord himself Arjuna continues to ask for more from Krishna, knowing that he has received an opportunity that not everyone gets so easily. Only when Krishna says that all of this is a part of a greater plan drawn to destroy evil, and that even if Arjuna didn't proceed with his duty Krishna would take his place and fulfil it, does Arjuna decide to go on with the plan for greater good.

During this lengthy discourse where Arjuna shoots Krishna with a lot of questions, Krishna offers insights on various philosophies like that of the concept of karma, yoga, the ten avatars of Vishnu, different states of human nature, etc. Even though Krishna says that he is the Absolute One and that when a man or woman sacrifices everything they feel or do or get to the Lord Incarnate, their life becomes blissful, nowhere does he insist that everyone must worship him. In fact, he says that he would be there for anyone who is and tries to be a good person, irrespective of his belief or disbelief in God. Another best thing about the *Gita* is that after such a lengthy conversation, in the end Krishna leaves everything to Arjuna's choice. Arjuna seeks guidance and Krishna offers it. But in the end, it is Arjuna who takes the final decision.

2.4 An Analysis of Pai's Narrative Techniques

“While analyzing the retellings much thought has to be given to how much the writers deviate from the original, in what way and why. This will give a glimpse into the kind of thinking which has governed the re-interpretation by the writers. This will involve close reading, almost a total reading of both the re-told and the original narratives. While analyzing the novelistic re-tellings of the epic, one has to look deep into the narrative employed by the authors. In other words, there is a need to employ narrative as interpretation.” (Pai, 2005, p. 33)

Roopa Pai's attempt to convey the essence of this text to children, when it is considered complex for even adults to understand, is to be appreciated. She accumulates the gist of each chapter and presents it in a manner that children can easily relate with and understand. Apart from this she also adds additional information about the text in between. She has added footnotes to explain some not-so-easy terms. Every other page of the book is beautifully illustrated by Sayan Mukherjee. Pai herself admits that she just had a ‘passing familiarity’ with the *Gita* before beginning to work on this text. Her efforts and the depth of her research is visible from the way she has presented the book.

Pai also divides her book into eighteen chapters like in the ‘original’ and the title she has given for every chapter hits the nail right on the head, and some chapters have more than one title. Pai begins her book by quizzing her readers on how much they already know about the *Gita*. In this way, she passes on the basic details about the ‘original’ text, like that of the number of chapters and verses in it. Like Rajagopalachari and Gandhi and unlike Devdutt Pattanaik, she mentions that stories like these, act as allegories and “work on many levels”. Therefore, she says that the battle in the epic could actually refer to the constant battle that happens within one’s mind when they struggle to choose between the right and the “not-so-right”. Pai admits that through Arjuna, Krishna speaks to all humans and the holy texts of every religion preach almost similar ideas.

This book is an example of Pai’s style of writing. She makes reading a learning process with fun. Her subtle humour and engaging tone make the text more light-hearted and complex philosophies are dissected with her lucidity. After she is done explaining a particular concept, she shifts the focus of the readers to other details like facts about the war, the battle strategy, the epic and so on. She often connects a thread between the sayings of the *Gita* and the current world. For instance, she draws out the similarity between the *Akshauhini* and the modern-day chess. She culls out references of ideas similar to that of *Gita* from various sources, like mythologies of other regions and even Michael Jackson and Shakespeare for that matter. This attempt would not only help the children (or any reader) connect mythology with the real world, but also make them understand a sense of connectivity among everything in the universe and therefore understand the concept of intertextuality in this manner.

Pai’s method of writing in itself is strategical and makes reading a multi-levelled learning process. On one level is the reader’s comprehension of the plot. On the second level is the reader’s comprehension of the backstory and supplementary information. On the third level, the children learn to look at any text with different perspectives and realise that the meaning of anything does not always stop with the literal sense alone. Only when children are exposed to such thoughts, will they know that there is something more to life than games, exams, marks, career and money.

Intermittently, Sanskrit verses from the *Gita* are mentioned wherever relevant, along with their pronunciations and translations in English. She explains technical terms like *Akshauhini* [battalion], *Atimaharathi* [a ranking given to a warrior], etc., in detail. She also makes a mention of some of the rules of the war. For instance, one primary rule of the war was that it must begin at sunrise and end at sunset. She explains the various names given to Arjuna and Krishna. She explains the months, the seasons and their significance from early times. She also makes a mention of various other *Gitas*, some within the *Mahabharata* and some outside it.

The most interesting technique Pai uses in the book is that she looks at the world and the *Gita* from the eyes of a child. What would a child do if it does not know how to put all these values learnt from the *Gita* into use? Then, this work too would be like any other preaching book that asks children to be good, think good and do good. But Pai is different. For example, the *Gita* talks about “multi-thinking” in the eighth chapter. Pai discusses a very familiar instance to explain the concept. It is usual for a child to get upset when its mother asks the child to do a household chore while its sibling is always let free. Then the child would begin to think why her mother always burdens her with tasks. Parallel to such thoughts, Pai insists that the child could also think that maybe she is chosen all the time because she does the work better. Cultivating such kinds of parallel thoughts becomes a habit over time and shall make the child more positive-minded. There are many pages in the book, where Pai talks to her

readers, the children, directly and she gives suggestions like these to help children cope their life with guidance from the *Gita*. This narrative technique called as 'breaking the fourth wall' is often used to make the reader feel involved in the story world. Pai uses second person narration in such places and third person narration for conversations between Krishna and Arjuna, and Dritarashtra and Sanjaya. Pai's language differs as a narrator and a speaker. When addressing the children, she makes use of a much casual tone and diction.

Krishna motivates Arjuna, and as a parallel, Pai motivates the children. The book begins with Arjuna in a dilemma and Krishna does a wonderful job in putting Arjuna's mind to rest. Similarly, Pai attempts to provide clarity to various questions that would keep bubbling in the minds of children, using the ideas of the *Gita*. However, like Krishna, she too says that in the end, it is all up to the reader's choice!

Findings and Discussion:

Mythological retellings for children are abridged versions of ancient mythology written specifically for this target audience. Such works are mostly didactic and moralising. The source myth is largely edited to make it age-appropriate for the children. The language and the plot are much simplified here. The language used is more conversational and engaging. Most often, it is not poetic as found in the source text. The presentation is more attractive with colourful illustrations, well-designed pages and large fonts. It is common to see mythological retellings for children, in comic or graphic novel forms or animations with mythical figures as action-heroes. While retelling for children, mythology is moulded into hero versus villain plots filled with action. In the end, there is always the triumph of good over evil. Amar Chitra Katha stories are good examples of mythological retellings for children. Animations like *Little Krishna* are also mythological retellings made for children, having the above-said features. Children have a natural affinity to super-hero stories and that is how mythology is presented to them.

Based on the narrative analysis conducted following a qualitative research methodology, it is observed that Roopa Pai's *Gita: For Children* provides an abridged version of the morals and ethics found in the *Gita* to the young children. Her narration makes the topic lighter and engaging. Adding to her fun and fact-filled narration, the book is also beautifully illustrated. The book has three parallel conversations happening one after another. One is the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, second is the conversation between Dritarashtra and Sanjaya and the third is between Roopa Pai and her readers where she 'breaks the fourth wall' between the narrator and the reader. *The Gita* being a philosophical segment, there is not much action in the text, otherwise it follows all the other features mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The text is a work of Applied Mythology, making the ancient text relevant to a school-going child of the twenty-first century. Her narration makes reading a multi-levelled process, in which she lets the children learn how to connect mythology with their own life and environment.

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