



Hybridity, Marginal Power, Morality, Trauma and Cultural Memory in Amish Tripathi's *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*

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Abstract

This study aims at a postcolonial reading of contemporary popular mythology, using Amish Tripathi's *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* as an example. The book proposes a post-colonial interpretation of popular mythology, taking the case of Amish Tripathi's *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*. Through the theories of Edward Said's Others, Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and ambivalence, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's marginality and Frantz Fanon's trauma, this paper focuses on a close reading of the novel. It shows how Tripathi has pushed back the stereotype of a heroic good guy and villainistic bad guy, and highlights the emotions expressed by Raavan, his philosophical insights, and his political consciousness. The novel also depicts the significance of popular literature as a space of culture, where mythological stories are being retold in order to address the ongoing debates in the society about morality, identity, leadership and power.

Keywords: Othering And Trauma, Moral VS Popular Mythology, Cultural Memory and Identity.

Introduction

Indian mythological fiction has had a remarkable rebirth in the 21st century. Myths are usually

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found in the sacred texts and oral history, but now they are more visible in today's popular literature. Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik, Ashok Banker and others have reshaped the ancient epics into bestsellers which cater to both academia as well as general readership. These retellings are not just about telling the same old stories, they are about questioning taken for granted notions of heroism, morality, justice, governance, and identity. Contemporary authors place mythological characters in historically believable and psychologically realistic places, challenging readers to revisit stories that have been believed as cultural fact for the longest time.

Of these writers, Amish Tripathi is in a different league due to his systematic reinterpretation of Indian mythology in a rational, political and philosophical manner. His Ram Chandra Series differs from the regular retelling in its approach; it portrays the events from various points of view and has characters who are considered to be heroes, narrating their own accounts, while the ones who are villains tell their own. These narrative strategies unsettle 'moral oppositions' and bring into focus the processes of identity formation.

One of the most ambitious reinterpretations from Tripathi is *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*. The novel does not portray Raavan as a supernatural demon who has to be faced; what the book does do is to make him a very intellectual kid whose life is dictated by physical deformity, social exclusion, family rejection, emotional trauma and never-ending ambition. The metamorphosis of becoming the feared king of Lanka is not destined nor inevitable. Rather, it grows from an accumulation of personal misfortunes, institutional bias, and personal decisions that have a cumulative effect on his moral, power, and justice framework.

This reinterpretation is not only a Mythological re-interpretation. Historical memories and cultural identities are reconfigured at an increasing amount of popular texts. Now, readers do not tolerate an easy separation between good and bad, between heroes and villains, but want to see stories that recognize the human psychology and moral ambiguity that lurk beneath the surface. This cultural shift is met with Raavan's portrayal as not only a villain but a character of great humanity whose rise and fall stem from the same emotional and intellectual roots.

This paper aims towards stating that Raavan's villainy is not an inherent quality but a divine punishment as well. Instead, he is a conscious reaction to the pain, shame and exclusion in a society that has been and continues to label him as outsider. The study shows that the Othering, the theories of hybridity and ambivalence by Homi Bhabha, the discourse concept of marginality by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and the analysis of trauma by Frantz Fanon, are all invoked by Tripathi as a means of constructing the Raavan as a postcolonial subject whose identity is formed in social discourse, not biological destiny. This interdisciplinary approach will be used to argue that *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* is not just a retelling of a mythological narrative, but a complex popular text which reflects, examines and challenges notions of power, morality, identity and cultural memory in a contemporary postcolonial context.

Literature Review

Popular literature academics claim that mythological fiction serves as a mediator between literary or literary canon and mass consumption. Unlike classic epics that tend to depict characters in unequivocal moral contexts, modern retellings are enigmatic and often

psychologically realistic and politically charged. Thus, the domain of the mythological fiction has emerged as a significant arena for the engagement and discussions of gender, nationalism, governance, identity, caste, trauma, and cultural memory.

Studies focusing especially on *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* have been mainly interested in the humanization of the mythological opponent. Raavan's childhood, his intellectual brilliance, his scientific nature, his military brains and his political ambition is a research subject of scholars. Many studies state that Tripathi brings out a new Raavan; the stereotype of a villain from the past is transformed to a tragic hero who is surrounded by his weaknesses but has powers too. Many studies interpret the presence of a psychologically plausible Trishnag and his strengths and weaknesses in one and the same personality of Raavan. Others read the novel as a critique on the use of absolutes insofar as each of the characters in the novel possesses both virtues and vices.

Although they have each contributed to the research, such studies are often more focused on Raavan's political stance or intelligence or his role as leader, rather than on how society creates him as an outsider. The intersection and interplay of stigma, social discrimination, trauma and identity development are relatively underdeveloped, however. Likewise, while some scholars recognize Raavan's feeling of loss, relatively few scholars examine the political and philosophical nature of grief and its impact on Raavan's perception of power, morality, and success.

In this paper, I will be exploring these gaps between postcolonial theory and psychological analysis. The feeling of Otherness is summed up by Edward Said's theory of Other, which describes how dominant societies construct outsiders via discourse and representation. Through these ideas of hybridity and ambivalence, Homi K. Bhabha uncovers the volatility of the classical binary opposition of hero and villain which frames the Ramayana. In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of marginality, focus is paid to marginalized voices from the history of the main story. In addition, the trauma and violence studies of Frantz Fanon continue to shed light on the effects of continuous humiliation and exclusion on individual consciousness and political actions.

Along with these theoretical approaches, this paper also analyzes Tripathi's psychological approach towards grief and ambition. The novel repeatedly and persistently reminds the reader that the struggles of the flesh could be transforming, rather than relegated to arrogance or desire, as is the case with traditional interpretations of Raavan's downfall. Grief is evoked, it is not just a state of feeling it is a force that changes everything, moral, ambition, identity. But, Raavan admits to a "monster" inside him, one that is needed for greatness that is not "good." So, villainy is therefore not evil by nature but a conscious choice in philosophy to the reaction of repeated rejection and loss.

Thus, this article maintains that *Raavan, Enemy of Aryavarta* is not merely a successful retelling of a mythological story, but of a major postcolonial popular literature too. The article explores the connections between Othering, trauma, morals, ambition and grief and therefore helps to investigate Raavan's character in the novel and also how cultural beliefs of mythological history are remade in the present-day popular fiction. By so doing, it adds to the

broadier debates on popular literature's ability to reconstruct marginalised identities and the disorienting of the hegemonic discourses in postcolonial India.

3. Theoretical Framework

A way of reinterpretation of the mythological stories in the Indian popular literature has given rise to new possibilities of writing postcolonial literary critique. In contrast to the notion of epic characters as moral archetypes, writers like Amish Tripathi have reconstructed the characters as historically contingent persons whose identity is formed through the intricate relationship between society and politics and personal history. In this way, *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* is not just a mythological story, but also a literary study of identity, marginalisation, trauma, and power. This paper will use an interdisciplinary post-colonial lens to examine these elements, using the work of Edward Said's theory of Othering, Homi K. Bhabha's theorisations of hybridity and ambivalence, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theorisations on the Marginality, and Frantz Fanon's theorisations on Trauma and Violence. The Construction of the "Other" is the title of Edward Said's book. Edward Said's book is titled *The Construction of the "Other"*. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) represented a new approach to the study of postcolonialism by showing that identities are not always a matter of "objective reality," but rather created through representation. Said argues that dominant societies enact an "Other" that is perceived as irrational, dangerous, uncivilized or immoral in order to secure their power.

These images capture the exclusionary nature of representation and at the same time reinforce the superiority of the dominant group. While Said's analysis is mainly focused on the colonial discourse, his understanding of othering goes beyond the reach of imperialism. All societies establish groups that exclude certain people as outsiders. Body size, size differences, the skin colour, race, religion, caste, gender often serve as signposts around which communities segregate into 'Us' and 'Them'.

This is an example of what happens to Tripathi's Raavan. His deformity is more pronounced in the form of Naga from the time he is born and it outweighs his intelligence and character. He is known to society before he does his heroic or villainous deed: body stigma. His identity is therefore not a natural one, but it is socially constructed. He doesn't actually scare people, he only scares them because of the depiction he has in the cultural mind.

The view is entirely different from the usual one, which is that of the traditional horse. This view is quite different from the traditional view of Raavan primarily because this is the view of a traditional horse. Rather than posing the question of his wickedness, the novel questions the formation of enemies by communities of prejudice and representation. Said's ideas then lay the groundwork for an understanding of Raavan as a postcolonial "Other".

The previous scholarship on the Ram Chandra Series can be broadly classified into four different classifications. The first looks into Tripathi's scientific interpretation of mythology and history. It has been speculated that he has used his stories as a means to make miracles technologically and politically plausible, making epics accessible to modern audiences. The second strand of discussion is on governance and leadership where the novels are examined as political allegories that discuss statecraft, justice, law and institutional leadership. A third field of research explores gender, particularly the depiction of Sita as an independent political leader

and military strategist. Last, some research has explored the series from a philosophical and ethical angle, which emphasizes Tripathi's focus on dharma, free will and moral responsibility.

One of the main focuses of research specifically centered on *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* has been focused on portraying Raavan as human. There is a lot of research that has been done on Raavan's childhood, intellectual brilliance, scientific nature, military genius and his political ambition. A large number of studies has maintained the hypothesis that Raavan is nothing but a common stereotype of a villain, but is merged with his flaws into a tragically human personality. This is because many studies have argued that Raavan is a common stereotype of a villain but with his weakness intertwined with his strength, it creates a psychologically convincing Raavan. Others read the novel as a comment on absolute moral dichotomy, showing that the virtues and the vices are not restricted to the two sides of the camp but are found in every other character.

This paper seeks to bridge these three gaps by combining postcolonial theory with psychological analysis. Edward Said's Othering theory is a theory of the creation of outsiders through discourse and representation in dominant societies. Through his ideas of hybridity and ambivalence, Homi K. Bhabha uncovers the fluidity of the dichotomy of hero and villain in the Ramayana. The theory of "marginality" by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak focuses on recovering voices that have been silent in the canonized stories. The long-standing and pervasive experience of humiliation and exclusion is further explored in Frantz Fanon's writings on trauma and violence, which help to delineate the ways in which it affects individual consciousness and political action.

Beyond these theory-based frameworks, this paper explores how the concept of grief and ambition is explored in Tripathi's philosophy. The novel suggests continually that, rather than being a consequence of arrogance or desire, suffering is transformative, a fact that goes against "traditional" interpretations, which have defined Raavan's downfall in one way or another. Grief is not just an emotional state, but a power that can be seen to transform morality, ambition, and identity. Raavan recognizes that the "monster" that lives within him must be acknowledged and embraced; that to be great requires something that is not in line with normality, goodness. As such, evil is not evil, but rather a choice made in philosophy because of the repeated experience of rejection and loss.

Another key contribution of this study is that it focuses on popular literature as an ideology discourse. Modern mythological novels are not merely reenactments of ancient narratives but are involved in the current cultural discussions about power, justice, identity, and history. Tripathi's invitation to readers to relate to one of the most reviled characters in Indian mythology unsettles the conventional notion of hero and villain. The novel raises the question of whether people are remembered for what they did or what "history" they created for themselves by selectively narrating events from their lives.

The argument made in this article is that *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* could not be considered just a successful mythological retelling but also as an important postcolonial popular literature. The study explores the themes of grief, ambition, trauma, morality and Othering, creating a new understanding of the character Raavan and the way in which current

popular fiction reflects the cultural understanding of mythological history. It also allows for a wider discussion of the function of popular literature in the reconstruction of marginalised identities and the contestation of the dominant narratives in postcolonial India.

Edward Said's *Orientalism*

The seminal work in postcolonial studies, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), showed that some identities are constructed by means of representation, not objective reality. Said claims that dominant societies exercise their power by creating an "Other" who is presented as irrational, dangerous, uncivilized, or morally disadvantaged. This kind of representation promotes exclusion and validates the superiority of the dominant group.

While Said's work is mostly focused on colonial discourse, his argument of Othering has implications beyond colonial relations. All societies develop a category system, in which some people are excluded. Physical features, skin color, religion, caste, gender and/or bodily difference are often means by which communities come up with their boundaries. Raavan is the example of this by Tripathi. His Naga deformity is more important than his intelligence or his character, from his childhood. Society identifies him before he does any hero or villainous act on the basis of his body. So who he is is not a natural but a social attribute. Everyone is afraid of him because of his incidence in cultural discourse, not because of who he is.

This is a different point of view from the traditional one on Raavan. The novel does not ask the question of whether he is evil, but rather how communities make enemies in the form of prejudice and representation. Said's framework then serves as the basis to understand Raavan as a postcolonial "Other".

Homi K. Bhabha: Hybridity and Ambivalence

Although Said gives us a description of the construction of the outsider, Homi K. Bhabha shows that identities cannot be fixed or permanent. Within *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha claims that cultural identities are not static but rather developed by means of negotiation. His ideas of hybridity and ambivalence are a departure from dichotomies like civilized/barbaric, colonizer/colonized, and hero/villain.

Hybridity is created where there are several influences that are sometimes conflicting. Ambivalence implies that people are at the same time on two sides, and that they cannot be easily categorized.

Throughout his story, Tripathi depicts this ambivalence in Raavan. He is the exceptional scientist, musician, warrior, administrator and sincere brother. He is also ruthless, ambitious and can be very violent. These paradoxical qualities are opposed to the single-contrast notion of absolute good and absolute bad, which is a common binary to be found in characterizations.

Her intention in tripathi is to intentionally dismantle the inherited categories of moralities. The reader loves the intellect of Raavan and wonders about how he did it. They feel compassion for his pain and disapprove of many of his actions. This emotional insecurity is illustrative of Bhabha's theory that identities are malleable and not fixed.

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The novel is also a hybrid in its form. It's a mixture of mythology, historical fiction, political philosophy, psychology and popular telling. Such a hybridity allows Tripathi to re-read the ancient epic for contemporary readers while retaining its cultural resonance.

Spivak: Marginality and Representation

The last book in the trilogy is suitable with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Marginality and Representation. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is an influential essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Pronounces by (1988) takes up the subject of marginalized voices being muted in the systems of representation that dominate. Powerful institutions often represent others, rather than letting them represent themselves, Spivak said.

The old versions of the Ramayana mainly feature the story through the eyes of Rama and the dharma. Raavan is typically only featured as an antagonist whose motivations are sparsely explored. He does not experience himself, but he is constructed by the voice of others.

This changes in Tripathi, in which Raavan assumes the central role of the novel's consciousness, upsetting this hierarchy of the narrative. They are witness to his childhood fears, emotional sufferings, intellectual curiosity, personal losses, political aspirations and philosophical reflections. He does not certainly serve as the enemy of Rama anymore; he becomes a full-fledged human, a voice that speaks against the centuries of literature.

Thus, Spivak's theory elucidates the significance of the novel by Tripathi. The novel gives voice to one of the most marginalized characters in mythology, challenging the power of dominant cultural narratives and compelling readers to re-think accepted historical facts.

Concept of trauma, violence and identity

The concept of trauma, violence and identity as explored by Franz Fanon. Frantz Fanon's work gives a psychological component to the analysis of post-colonialism. Fanon outlines that the cycle of humiliation, discrimination and exclusion has a deep impact on individual consciousness in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Violence is not just physical it is also created and manifested by psychological oppression and denial of human dignity.

This view is very helpful in the context of what happened to Raavan. All along the novel, Raavan is continually rejected due to appearance, family background and perceived difference. These experiences build up over time, resulting in extreme emotional suffering and a need for attention.

Repeatedly, it is suggested that grief, not evil, is the source of Raavan's later violence. Within the novel itself this relationship is expressed metaphorically with a drain that overflows: A man's anger can run out of control, when he is filled with grief, when he is racked with anger at what is done to him, then his anger is thrown in all the four directions.

This comes very close to Fanon's claims that the impetus to violence often settles in the individual and is experienced as both internal and external. Raavan's anger, then, is not

irrational, it is born of a long period of humiliation and emotional deprivation. Even with this fact there is nothing that excuses his actions in the novel. Rather, it is a shining example of how the pain of suffering can be turned into an extraordinary talent, which becomes a destructive drive.

Raavan as the Postcolonial Other: Body, Stigma, and Social Exclusion

This is a fundamental change in the Ramayana story presented in *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* by Amish Tripathi as he does not portray Raavan as an evil entity by itself. The novel starts with his childhood, forcing the reader to experience the social and psychological environment in which he grew up and that led to his becoming the powerful king of Lanka. It is an approach to narratives that also focuses attention away from destiny and divine judgment and towards historical and cultural dynamics that shape the construction of the outsider. By so doing, Tripathi takes Raavan out from the realm of the mythological villain and into the world of the postcolonial subject whose identity is crafted through processes of exclusion, bodily stigma, and institutional prejudice.

According to Edward Said, the Other is not born, but rather manufactured in the discourse. In dominant societies, they define themselves through the creation of certain individuals, or communities, as abnormal, dangerous or inferior. These representations which turn difference into deviance are then powerful tools for social control. This process is certainly comparable to that of Tripathi's portrayal of Raavan. Even before Raavan does bad deeds and takes over political control over his realms, he is condemned on the ground of his Naga deformity. His appearance becomes a cultural emblem that is used to shape the manner by which others view him. In an environment where it is not intelligence or compassion or even his super abilities that are recognized, it's his body. So, he doesn't feel like he selects the name himself, but that his name is forced upon him.

The family is the place of exclusion time and again in the novel. Vishrava is a wise sage who is having a hard time accepting his son's physical difference. He knows that Raavan is intelligent, but the disappointment grates against his child's soul every day. It is in the exchange of family, where one is supposed to find emotional security, that one first experiences internalization of stigma. Fanon claims that the repetition of humiliation tends to tear apart the individual consciousness and to create psychological conflict. This divided identity is shown in Raavan's desire for recognition and his animosity towards the system of authority. Thus, in the novel, one can infer that emotional abuse is often the first step towards physical violence.

In this context Tripathi takes the criticism a step further through his handling of the Naga community. In the novel, discrimination is not found to be the prejudice of one or more individuals, but rather discrimination is located within social institutions. Inability to come into the world physically without deformities is seen as a threat to social purity, and exclusion becomes accepted as a moral obligation. These times reveal a culture's justification for violence over a need for order and tradition. The discussion of marginality is especially relevant here, according to Spivak. People classified as unclean, or undesirable, do not get to represent themselves; for they are instead represented by a dominant voice that sets the social value of the people who are classified as such. Raavan's life is spent in a place like this, and people around him always make up their minds about him before he gets to have a voice.

But, Tripathi does not see Raavan as just a victim. The novel focuses on his exceptional talents in addition to his exclusion. In his capacities as a scientist, musician, administrator and soldier, he shows exceptional talent and ability that go far beyond the expectations of his peers. Believe it or not, such achievements do not wipe out social prejudice. Stigma will not be defeated by merit as it does not exist in achievement but in cultural assumptions. This paradox serves as a case in point in Said's explanation that dominant societies maintain their own hierarchical structures by denying the humanity of their outsiders.

Ambivalence is also explored in Bhabha's theory which also helps elucidate Raavan's role in the novel. He is at once a genius, a demon, a saint, a coward and a hero. Readers are asked to appreciate his wits and to poke fun at his ethics. The idea of a binary system, a traditional binary system that distinguishes hero and villain, is disturbed by such complexity. In contrast to being polar opposites in terms of morality, Rama and Raavan are people who have been differently affected by history, choices, and experiences. The novel begins to invite the readers to question the notions of right and wrong that they had taken for granted.

Narrating Raavan's childhood is also an important literary revision by Tripathi. Conventional versions do not often allow for an antagonist with emotional depth or tellable story. Rather, Raavan is most of all a hurdle to Rama's victory. But with *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*, he puts his subjectivity back, letting the reader share his fears, hopes and disappointments with his losses. The novel does the "recovery of the lost voice, the voice of the margins" (567), which is what Spivak calls this narrative mutation. Raavan is not just the subject of history, he's the one who tells it and interprets it.

This means that the transformation of Raavan is not just seen as a fall into evil. It is the cumulative effect of ongoing humiliation, exclusion and lack of belonging. He is produced by a society which is continually telling him that he is different. In so focusing the reader, Tripathi invites readers to rethink what constitutes monstrosity in the first place. Throughout the novel, the author suggests that there are not many monsters; they are mostly created by human communities that fail to acknowledge the humanity of those that they exclude.

It is one of the most important re-tellings in contemporary Indian popular literature. This is not a mere retention of the moral certitude of the epic tradition, but an interrogation of the processes by which societies make norms, purity and legitimacy. Thereby, it can be said that Raavan is a strong postcolonial construct whose failure is not just his own, but the social circumstances which allowed him to fail.

Conclusion

Amish Tripathi's *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* is one of the most important contributions to present-day popular mythology in India for it is a challenge to the inherited image of Raavan as the absolute evil. Instead of rehashing the standard epic tale, Tripathi presents a character of Raavan as a 'psychologically complex' human being whose identity arises out of tumultuous and unpredictable experience: grief, social exclusion, intellectual brilliance, political aspiration, and personal choice. The novel shows us that there is nothing natural or divine about the villain, it is a thing formed through a long history of humiliation, rejection and the

constant pursuit of recognition.

This study has proposed the concept of integrated postcolonial approach to understand the change of Raavan's being an "Enemy of Aryavarta". Othering; the conceptualization of outsiders, as developed by Edward Said, is a process through which dominant cultures produce them by assigning moral and cultural significance to bodily difference. Even as a child, a Naga deformity is enough to label Raavan a social outcast, shaping his destiny before he has a chance to prove himself. His experiences show that enemies can be made in a society before people even think of opposing it.

Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of "hybridity" and "ambivalence" also throw light on the reinterpretation by Tripathi. Raavan is not just to be a good or evil guy. He is a man of science and conqueror, a musician and a warrior, a romantic brother and a ruthless emperor. This also challenges the moral certainty and invites readers to accept the fluid nature of the demarcations made by culture throughout time in the framework of epic stories. Similarly, a consideration of Rama's characterization which assumes Rama's humanity and juxtaposes him with Raavan's humanity reveals that the myth is not about one thing only, but many.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also has an important article on the idea of the marginal in relation to the strategy of the novel. Most of the times one does not find any accounts by Raavan in traditional versions of the Ramayana. After Raavan gets the centre of the stage, Tripathi adds another layer to this missing thread, focussing on his character. The focus on Raavan and his character brings in more in the area of vision lost to the narrative with him at the centre of it. The reader is made to experience his fears, his aspirations, his sadness, his failures, his philosophical reflections and thus recovers the voice of a character who has been reduced to an object of moral condemnation. This is not an attempt to "glorify" Raavan; it is an attempt to challenge the authority of dominant narratives that decide who is remembered as Hero or Villain.

Perhaps the best explanation for Raavan's psychological transformation is to be found in a study of trauma by psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. The novel repeatedly shows how the unhealed wound of grief and the repeated humiliation changes the consciousness of individuals. As well, Raavan's suffering and his ambition are inextricably intertwined, and his quest for recognition slowly turns into an unrelenting quest for power. Violence thus becomes not an evil in itself, but an inevitable outcome of a long time of psychological suffering and conscious ethical decisions.

This study therefore concludes that Tripathi's reinterpretation of Raavan is not merely a literary revision but a significant postcolonial intervention. Through the combined lenses of a postcolonial, interdisciplinary approach that is supported by the theories of Edward Said, Othering; Homi K. Bhabha, Hybridity and Ambivalence; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on the concept of marginality; and Frantz Fanon, on trauma and violence. Thus *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* is not just a retelling of a mythological narrative, but a complex popular text which reflects, examines and challenges notions of power, morality, identity and cultural memory in a contemporary postcolonial context.

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