Bulletin of Nexus
Multidisciplinary International Research Journal, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access Journal
ISSN : 3065-7865 / Volume-3, Issue-9, September 2026

Original Article

Indian Literature and Culture in Contemporary Fiction: Reimagining Tradition in Amish Tripathi's Novels

Rameshar Prasad Nishad[1], I. D. Tiwari[2]
[1]. Govt. Shahid Koushal Yadav College, Gunderdehi, Balod, Chhatttisgarh, India
[2]. Rajkumari Indira Singh Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalay, Khairagarh Chhatttisgarh, India

Manuscript ID:
BN-2026-030902

ISSN: 3065-7865

Volume 3

Issue 9

September 2026

Pp. 5-8

Submitted: 07 Aug 2026

Revised: 16 Aug 2026

Accepted: 12 Sept. 2026

Published: 30 Sept. 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.23387819
DOI link:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23387819

Abstract:
Literature and culture of any nation play a significant role in its development, shaping its identity, values, and social harmony. The duo can play a pivotal role in human beings' life, reflecting India's thousands of years of history and diversity. Both are interrelated and have wide- ranging influences on other cultures and traditions around the world. They not only cherish individual growth but also foster a collective consciousness that values harmony, innovation, and human dignity. Indian culture adopts the beliefs and the values of the society. However, literature, in contrary, describes them in different forms of literary work, entirely affecting each other. Indian literature includes ancient literature, medieval literature, and modern literature. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata are ancient literatures which have their own cultural affects on people in their respective ages. The four Vedas are the four columns of ancient Indian literature and they provide a keen insight into ancient Indian society and spirituality. Indian literature has mainly focused on spirituality, mythology, and societal burning issues like caste, race, gender, and politics. Indian culture has many facets of traditions deeply influenced by various languages, religions, festivals, music, art and architectures, social values and practices, paving the way for inspiring writers of different ages to write about.

Keywords: *Indian literature, culture, tradition, human beings, spirituality, mythology, religion, social values etc.*

Introduction:

Literature is the mirror of society that can reflect societal norms, challenges, and aspirations. It is like a reservoir that preserves a nation's history, values, and beliefs. Culture shapes behaviours, norms, and social structures, influencing economic and social progress. Many Indian Contemporary writers like Amish Tripathi have played a significant role in preserving and promoting India's rich cultural heritage and literary traditions through his mythological writings. His duo book series "Shiva Trilogy" and "Ram Chandra Series" have not only reinterpreted the India's developing socio-political landscape but also ensured that its diverse narratives continue to flourish in the modern era. His novels embrace societal issues, values, tradition, and culture, captivating the readers by presenting mythological figures as relatable characters facing timeless dilemmas.

Indian culture has assimilated various religions, festivals, languages, clothing, music, and arts as its elements, which significantly influenced the whole world, reflecting the unity in diversity. This diversity in Indian culture teaches individuals to embrace differences, enriching personal and social lives. Human being is deeply rooted to cultures of one's own country. Culture is a human phenomenon. Due to special physical and mental capability only human could develop culture. Culture is one of the characteristics of human society which is associated with many aspects of human life.

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Address for correspondence:
Rameshar Prasad Nishad,Govt. Shahid Koushal Yadav College, Gunderdehi, Balod, Chhatttisgarh, India
Email: nishadrameshar02@gmail.com

How to cite this article:
Nishad, R. P., & Tiwari, I. D. (2026). Indian Literature and Culture in Contemporary Fiction: Reimagining Tradition in Amish Tripathi's Novels. Bulletin of Nexus, 3(9), 5–8.
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23387819

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Website: https://bnir.us

Indian classical literature as Vedas, Upnishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagwad Gita instill ethical values in people, showing them the path of righteousness to attain *moksha* (salvation) from the cycle of birth and death. The stories of ancient Indian literature like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata through oral tradition or technological tradition (Television) ensure that wisdom is passed down generations. These traditions connect modern individuals with ancient traditions and literature which offer profound insights into human nature and societal structures, teaching moral lessons of dharma, altruism, compassion, and non-violence (ahimsa). By the practice of yoga, meditation, and self-introspection rooted in these literatures, one can achieve zenith of humanism and can make one's life sublime. Indian literature is as a root connected to each individual, imparting a sense of understanding of one's heritage and identity.

Indian literature, especially spiritualistic literature like Panchtantra, emphasizes on interpersonal relationships teaching the lessons to respect the elders, strengthen human bonds in relatable ways. Therefore, these literatures explore the spectrum of human emotions helping individuals understand feelings. Many classical literatures evoke empathy and compassion, sharpening emotional intelligence. For example Ram, a lead character in the Ramayana, shows the quality of self-awareness, accepting 14 years of exile. It expresses his reverence to his father, bonding to his family, and his duty. This deed adds a golden feather in his distinct identity. Indian culture has expanded limitless barriers of religion, caste, and nationality, believing the concept of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam* (the entire world is one family). This concept promotes universal brotherhood and encourages individuals to see themselves as part of a larger global community. The theme is the cornerstone of Indian culture, emphasizing the universal unity, harmony, and camaraderie.

Indian literature and culture have significantly influenced the people with their scientific views, cementing their beliefs in mythological and philosophical literature. They contain deep scientific knowledge of mathematics, medicine, metallurgy, astronomy, and environmental science. India is father of the origin of 'zero' that is the revolutionary contribution of Indian mathematics to the world. The Riga Veda, the first of four Vedas, has already presented the idea of 'nothingness' or 'void'. 'Zero' is considered to be one of the greatest intellectual achievements in human history. In other aforesaid fields, the groundbreaking discoveries have been made centuries ago, inspiring modern exploration and innovation and benefiting to the world. Ancient philosophical Indian literature always talks about the pathways to liberation by the righteousness. The concept of liberation is mentioned in different religious epics that the readers can see the colourful facets of the lessons they teach, reflecting diversity and dynamism of the society. The role of literature becomes particularly significant in creating awareness among people about their social responsibilities. Indian mythological writer Amish Tripathi has been remained conscious of the changing needs of society. Ayushi Zina has rightly said, "Amish Tripathi have engaged with their audience by transforming conventional narratives to resonate with contemporary youth, who desire a connection to their cultural heritage". (Zina, A 2021). Amish Tripathi raises social and political issues in his novels. By revisiting the cultural past and connecting it with contemporary realities, Amish's novels contribute a greater understanding of India's civilizational heritage.

Discussion:

After independence, India faced numerous social, political, economic, and cultural challenges. The newly independent nation had to address issues such as poverty, illiteracy, social inequality, caste discrimination, gender inequality, communal tensions, and the preservation of its cultural identity. In this changing socio-political environment, literature emerged as an important medium for reflecting upon social realities and creating awareness among people.

In contemporary Indian literature, many writers continue this tradition by presenting modern challenges through innovative narratives. Among them, Amish Tripathi occupies a significant position as a contemporary Indian author who reinterprets Indian mythology and cultural traditions in the context of the modern world. His novels combine mythological narratives with contemporary social, ethical, political, and cultural concerns. Amish's Shiva Trilogy tells the significance of the Ayurveda and its medicinal effect on human anatomy. Pragya Gauttam writes, "The study demonstrated the symbolic connection between Ayurveda's principles, including individualized treatment and the equilibrium of body, mind, and spirit, and the characters' evolution. It highlighted Ayurveda's relationship with nutrition, lifestyle, and spirituality, integrating old and contemporary concepts". (Gauttam P. 2024).

Amish's debut series, the *Shiva Trilogy*, consisting of *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas*, and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, offers a reinterpretation of the traditional figure of Shiva. In the series, Shiva initially appears as a tribal leader from the Tibetan

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region who upholds values of traditional and cultural heritage. He gradually becomes the Neelkanth, the savior of Meluhan Empire and, subsequently, Mahadev through his actions, choices, and ethical commitment. Amish has his view on Shiva, "A man becomes a Mahadev when he fights for good. A Mahadev is not born as one from his mother's womb. He is forged in the heat of battle, when he wages a war to destroy evil." (The Immortals of Meluha, p.346). His transformation is therefore associated not simply with divine status but with his response to injustice, social discrimination, political conflicts, and moral dilemmas. Through Shiva's character, Tripathi engages with contemporary concerns such as caste discrimination, social exclusion, the Vikarma system, merit, and the relationship between individual action and social status. S. Vijaya says, "Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy re-imagines the mythological figure of Shiva as a human hero, blending ancient mythology with modern themes." S. Vijaya (2020). His narrative thereby connects mythological imagination with contemporary social issues.

Shiva strongly opposes orthodox contemporary themes and societal issues like the caste and *vikarma* system pervaded in the Meluhan society. As Shiva responses Nandi for his Vikarma-woman remarks, "That sounds pretty ridiculous to me. A woman could have given birth to a still born child simply because she did not take proper care while she was pregnant. Or it could just be a disease. How can anyone say that she is being punished for the sins of her previous birth?" (The Immortals of Meluha, p-96). Amish, through the pragmatic character Shiva, gives the message to the society that there should not be any kind of discrimination regarding caste, races, and religion.

Similarly, in his second book series, "Ram Chandra Series", Amish Tripathi has portrayed the lead character Ram as a mortal human with extraordinary qualities, raising him to greatness through discipline, determination, dedication, and struggles. The series reinterprets the lives of major characters associated with the *Ramayana* and presents them from different perspectives. This book series includes; *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta,* and *War of Lanka.* Each book demonstrates Tripathi's attempt to revisit familiar mythological figures through a modern and humanised framework. Ram is a rigid follower of dharma, "Dharma is above all, even the king. Dharma is above the Gods themselves." (Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku, p. 130). Amish portrays Ram not as a divine incarnation but as a mortal human being who attains greatness through the strict adherence to his principles and dharma (righteousness). Amish's character is marked by internal conflicts, ethical dilemmas, and intricate decisions. His decision to accept exile and his commitment to the rule of law demonstrate the tension between personal desires and social responsibility. Through Ram, Amish Tripathi explores questions of duty, justice, morality, law, and the responsibilities of leadership.

Similarly, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* provides a significant reinterpretation of the traditional representation of Sita. Tripathi presents Sita as a warrior, strategist, administrator, and leader rather than limiting her identity to that of a traditionally submissive female character. Her intellectual ability, physical courage, political understanding, and leadership qualities challenge conventional representations of femininity. She is portrayed as a symbol of woman empowerment. Through Sita, Tripathi engages with contemporary concerns such as women's empowerment, gender equality, leadership, and individual agency. Her life demonstrates the significance of moral courage, determination, and adherence to one's principles in the face of adversity. Sita defines a true leader, "A leader is not just one who gives his people what they want. He must also be the one who teaches his people to be better than they imagined themselves to be." (*Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku*, p. 287).

Amish Tripathi's novels demonstrate how Indian mythology, literature and cultural traditions can be revisited in the light of contemporary concerns. His work bridges the past and the present, turning familiar myths into platforms for conversations on social justice, gender equality, merit, leadership, morality, individual responsibility and cultural identity. His reworking of mythological characters also proves the relevance of Indian literary and cultural traditions in the present day society. Therefore, the novels written by Amish Tripathi provide an opportunity to study the reflection of Indian culture and heritage in modern Indian literature and the concern of contemporary social and ethical issues.

Conclusion:

Amish Tripathi's novels are deeply rooted in Indian classical literature and culture, bridging the gap between ancient traditions and modern perspectives that offers his readers a nuanced understanding of Indian literature and culture. Amish, through his writings, tries to reach different sections of society to awaken the people from ignorance, illiteracy, social prejudices, and superstition. His novels play a pivotal role in reflecting, questioning, and influencing society.

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Acknowledgement

The authors sincerely express their gratitude to all those who provided valuable guidance, encouragement, and support in completing this research paper on "Indian Literature and Culture in Contemporary Fiction: Reimagining Tradition in Amish Tripathi's Novels." The study explores the relationship between Indian literature, culture, mythology, tradition, and contemporary social concerns as reflected in Amish Tripathi's works.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the valuable contributions of scholars and researchers whose studies on Indian literature, mythology, culture, Ayurveda, and the works of Amish Tripathi provided important academic support for this research. The primary literary works examined in the study, including the Shiva Trilogy and Ram Chandra Series, were also central to the analysis.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of thesis paper.

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