



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Title of the Book: *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean*

Author: Amruta Patil

Publisher: Noida, HarperCollins,

Publication Year: 2013

pp 272

Price: Rs. 799

Reviewed By:

Sakshi Dogra

Assistant Professor,

Department of English

Deshbandhu College

University of Delhi

Anecdotes and episodes culled from Indian mythology and epics were a substantial subject matter of the *Amar Chitra Kathas* introduced in 1967. Popular stories namely *Krishna*, *Hanuman*, *Sakuntala*, *Malvika*, *Urvashi* evoked a colourful world of gods, goddesses, heroes and villains. Besides criticism that is levied against the dominant ideology that these books were monumental in constituting, the illustrations or artwork are rather run-of-the-mill. There is evidently little attention that is paid to the backgrounds, the characters reek of imitation of western counterparts and the prose is overly didactic. Thus, when Amruta Patil authored a text such as *AdiParva*, which too takes on the mammoth sized task of giving visual expression to mythology, one is taken by the combination of her art work and prose style, the overall effect of which is particularly refreshing.

Published by Harper Collins, *AdiParva: Churnig of the Ocean* is the first instalment in the Graphic Novel trilogy to be written by Amruta Patil who is currently working on its sequel, slated to be called *Sauptik: Sleeping Ones, Rise*. *AdiParva* is her second graphic novel after *Kari*, which was published in 2008. Where *Kari* was situated in metropolitan Mumbai, *AdiParva* dwells on multiple stories from Mahabharata and Puranas. Interestingly, the very cover page of *AdiParva: Churning of the Ocean* boasts of a novel that is not authored by Amruta Patil but instead narrated *via* her. The graphic novel is divided into multiple sections beginning with the one titled 'Sutraddhar'. Both the cover page and the first section set the tone of the novel highlighting Patil's preoccupation with storytelling. It seems for her both she and the sutradhar are not creators of the story but rather narrators. The story is delivered through them. By extension the narrative of *AdiParva* is cast not as a fictional account of the Indian epics and mythologies but rather as a *rendition* of these classical epics.

The word rendition opens *AdiParva* to the following enquiries: How is the rendition in *AdiParva* different from the ones that preceded it? Is it only in its visual form, its illustrations that one can find any redemption? Or do the content and the prose too display a deliberate intervention on Patil's part? And ultimately how do the content and the form of *AdiParva* come together to pose certain engaging propositions? To speak of the artwork first, Patil's panels depict a pronounced influence of Indian art. She uses a variety of techniques and styles ranging from collages to acrylic to charcoal. Layering is an important technique in Patil's panels. The full page coloured panels on p. 56 and p. 69 reveal an underlying layer of humongous pictures of Krishna and Durga respectively which could have been taken from popular calendars, posters, temples etc. Also, newspaper and magazine cut-outs abound in her collages. Patil thus blends the classic and the popular not only by using the form of a graphic novel but more so by employing the techniques of collaging and layering.

AdiParva is narrated as a story within a story. The novel consistently alternates between black and white sketches and colourful acrylic paintings. Where the present is marked by black and white panels, the coloured panels narrate the interwoven stories of Kayshap, Janmejaya, Takshak, Yayati, Sakuntala, Kunti etc. Where the coloured panels capture the aforementioned tales, the black and white panels represent Ganga who is the narrator of the coloured panels. She is both a storyteller and a character in the story. She is a sutradhar who plays a part in the tale and also in its narration. However, instead of listening to her story patiently there are constant interruptions from the audience. Where some hurl obscenities at her others cast doubt at the truth of her stories. This interruption that the sutradhar is constantly subjected to marks an interesting feature of Patil's rendition of the tales of epics and puranas.

Sutradhar literally means someone who holds strings or threads. Thus the innumerable references to "knots", "thread", "threadbearer" are not metaphorical but extremely literal. The introduction of a sutradhar as pointed out before is the most interesting trope of *AdiParva* as it is a story about storytelling. In Sanskrit plays a sutradhar is entrusted with "bring(ing) the audience into the play linking their world outside the theatre with the world of the play." In *AdiParva*, Ganga is bestowed with the twin task of linking the world of the classical tales with that of the audience in the text and those of the readers outside the text. However, how is the world of the reader linked to the world of the mythological tales? What strategies does the text employ that trigger reflection on the part of the readers. As I suggest it's the strategy of self-reflexivity.

Some of the black and white panels in *AdiParva* are extremely self-reflexive. One of the most evident manifestations of this self-reflexivity is found on p. 99 when one of the men in the audience while listening to the sutradhar says "Notice how often this tale uses the lazy device of blessing and curse? To distract from a plot full of holes, I'd say. I know. I write plays for a living." The reader is immediately transposed to a world of critical reflection where these tales become merely mythological tales with their accompanying incompleteness and loopholes. As Maria Poulaki comments,

The self-reference or "self-reflexivity" of a text has been associated with a (more or less explicit) self-conscious/self-expository move on behalf of the maker, that has a distancing effect upon the reader/recipient. In the case of storytelling, self-reflexivity suspends the reader's or viewer's immersion into the story, and adds multiple layers of signification. In general, self-referential methods in art, literature and film have been considered tools that trigger critical reflection on behalf of the recipient. (1)

Panels on p.116 and p.217 mark similar interruptions in the text. Thus, Patil's *AdiParva: Churning of the Ocean* departs from earlier renditions of mythological tales firstly through its artwork which blurs the strict binary of high and popular art by using collages and layering. Secondly, this rendition is marked not by a quiet acceptance of the tale that the sutradhar narrates but a constant questioning, a constant suspicion that sometimes brings with it elements of self-reflexivity. The elements of self-reflexivity and the profusion of doubt, of suspicion at mythological stories are undoubtedly peculiar to our contemporary post-industrial realities.

Amruta Patil thus presents a classic yet novel world of epic stories and narration from the puranas. The shortcoming of the novel perhaps lies in the fact that any space of self-reflexivity that the black and white sketches might open is quickly subsumed by the coloured

panels which plunge the narrative forward. Thus, although *AdiParva: Churning of the Ocean* is not a retelling in the conventional sense of the term, elements of retelling do emerge if one carefully observes the techniques of narration that are used in its new rendition.

Works Cited:

Burdock, Maureen. "Interview with Amruta Patil." Eleven Eleven: Journal of Literature and Art 2013. nd. Web. 26 May 2015 (<http://elevenelevenjournal.com/issue-16/interview-with-amruta-patil/>)

Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Siyuan Liu, Erin B. Mee. "Glossary." Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Siyuan Liu, Erin B. Mee. Modern Asian Theatre and Performance 1900-2000. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 282.

Krishnamurti, Sailaja. "Constructing 'The Glorious Heritage of India': Popular Culture and Nationalistic ideology in Indian Biographical Comics." Culture and the State: Nationalisms. Ed. Zezulka-Mailloux, Gabrielle James Gifford. Massachusetts: CRC Humanities Studios Publishers, 2003. 112-125.

Patil, Amruta . "Raasleela". Umblical. January 16 2015. Web. 26 May 2015.
(<http://amrutapatil.blogspot.in/>.)

Poulaki, Maria. "Self-reflexivity, Description, and the Boundaries of Narrative Cinema." Academia.edu n.d. Web. 26 May 2015. (http://www.academia.edu/8490949/Self-reflexivity_Description_and_the_Boundaries_of_Narrative_Cinema)

Varughese, E. Dawson. Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction in English. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 137-144. Print