



Original Article

Literature as a mirror of Trade and Commerce in Amish Tripathi's Ramchandra Series

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This research paper delves into trade and commerce aspects treated in the literature especially in Amish Tripathi's Ramchandra Series. Amish Tripathi's Ramchandra Series is a mythological novel blended with fiction. Therefore, a reader feels that it should only deal with Gods and Goddesses and the stories around them but Amish Tripathi has beautifully blended each aspect of economic condition and discussed the minutest thing of trade. One of the main characters of the Ramchandra Series - Raavan has been portrayed as the greatest and successful trader after Kubaer. Raavan was a small trader and no one can think that one day he will be a character much sought after. Raavan with his trading skills reached a higher level. He achieved huge success through trade and commerce and became a King of Lanka. Due to his trading skills, he was one of the richest and strongest Kings in India. Also, he made his place in the literary world, in one of the great Epics of India. He made his kingdom the 'Golden Lanka'. This, Amish Tripathi has shown trade and commerce in his Ramchandra Series in a real form as a mirror reflects reality.

Keywords: Amish Tripathi , Ramchandra Series, Raavan, trade, commerce, Literature, Success, King.

Introduction

Many genius authors have penned down the story of the most sacred epic - *The Ramayana* in various ways. We find in this Literary galaxy one contemporary author - Amish Tripathi who has blended fiction into this great epic. He has used fiction with mythology, thus, creating a vast expanse of mythological story. He has touched all the dimensions of the story. He has not only focused on the story of Gods and Goddesses but also minutely described the life story of the villain. He has depicted the story in a balanced way. He didn't give highest importance to the good ones. Instead, he balanced the depiction of both good and bad in a very noble way. This made his work better for the young readers and presentable in today's scenario. He has judged each part of life of each person in a fair manner and as a perfect craftsman set an example of a glorious and an accomplished craftsmanship. He has touched the life of Raavan - a villain in every way. He has projected his bad qualities but at the same time did not forget to praise his skills of a great poet, musician, painter, devotee of Lord Shiva and the most knowledgeable person in the world. Along with these qualities, Amish Tripathi has painted Raavan's character in political, social and economical fields too. Politically, he was a powerful, strong and able leader.



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Socially, if we see, the author had shown the respect which Raavan had gained from his subjects. Economically also, Raavan was supreme leader in trade and commerce due to which he became wealthy. To explore the life story of a character, Amish Tripathi has minutely described each detail of the trade in his literary work. Thus, making literature a mirror of trade and commerce. Trade, trading place, people involved in it, the advantages gained by the rulers through it, the rulers hated traders, the traders' retaliation and the outcome of all this is beautifully explored and depicted in his Ramchandra Series.

Naarad was a trader in Lothal, an important port city of the Sapt Sindhu. As he has been described: 'Narad was a brilliant trader, but also a lover of art, poetry, and the latest gossip.' (War of Lanka, 29)

Trading places

Chilka lake is a prosperous trading place. Its physiography, climate and drainage made it a rich trading centre. Chilka is a vast lagoon and it is considered as one of the largest lagoons in the world.

"... In reality, while agriculture was indeed a munificent source of the kingdom's richest, its overflowing coffers were the result of brisk trade with other regions, near and far." (Raavan - Enemy of Aryavarta)

And the centre of this trade was Chilka lake. There were numerous ports along its shores. The ships could easily sail into it. The heavy traffic of vessels were deviated because there were small islands which acted as minor ports for the smaller ships. Chilka had an apt harbour which gave access to richest hinterland in the world. From Chilka lake, one could even carry out the trading through waters upto South Kosala and then can go towards north into Sapt Sindhu. Numerous ships anchored in the lake. There were traders always negotiating. Cargo used to be loaded and unloaded. Custom officers used to collect tax revenues. This place was the hub of traders, always sprawling with the din of vessels, traders and prosperity all around.

Trading Partners

Kubaer was a trader who had agreement with the other kingdoms to do trading in their kingdoms and in return he used to give them a share of profits. This was accepted by many kingdoms. Amish Tripathi's Ramchandra Series has explicitly explained this trading business as it was the base of achieving a lot of wealth. King Dashrath - Emperor of Sapt Sindhu hated this class as he felt achieving wealth through war is far better than squeezing profit from the people. The traders were not liked by him and he tried that the children of his kingdom should become warriors rather than traders. He had a hard core dislike for them. There were very few traders in Sapt Sindhu. Taking the advantage of the situation, he became the leader of all the traders of Sapt Sindhu and also made an agreement to do trading with the kingdom. "Kubaer struck a deal with the emperor of the Sapt Sindhu, and its subordinate kingdoms, by which he took over all their trading activities and paid the empire a large share of the profits." (Raavan - Enemy of Aryavarta, 52, 53)

All the kingdoms of Sapt Sindhu had agreed to do trading with Kubaer but the kingdom of Kalinga did not accept the leadership of trader Kubaer in the trading business because they were following the footsteps of King Dashrath who himself followed an anti-trader approach and started levying restrictions on trading activities. Kalinga appointed a Naharin administrator. He was from north-west of Babylon, in Mesopotamia. His name was Krakachabahu. He was given the post of governor of Chilka to run Chilka by himself. But the condition of the traders was not good because of oppressive restrictions.

"Soon traders in Kalinga began suffering the same tax terrorism and countless regulations that their fellow traders endured in the other kingdoms of Sapt Sindhu." (Raavan - Enemy of Aryavarta, 54)

Amish Tripathi in Ramchandra Series has left no stone unturned to give information of trading in Sapt Sindhu during those times. He had explained the traders, trading areas, their relation with the kings, their work load, problems, solutions, etc. Hence, using literature as a mirror of trade and commerce.

The traders' condition was not good in Kalinga and some even thought of leaving trading but they thought that they cannot do any other business. So they were thinking of finding the solution to it. Many products were smuggled but it could be confiscated if the products don't possess customary permits. When Raavan and Mareech first moved here, they took up the job of dock workers and gradually with his talent and daring quality, Raavan was famous among the traders. He had owned ships and through it carried out many smuggling missions, supplied goods far and wide and earned a lot of wealth.

The north Indian ports did not allow free trade and they started putting many restrictions. So Raavan, a foresight trader, moved towards the south and decided to make Gokarna his main trading base at the port of Lanka. This place was favorable for ships and trading. Gokarna port was useful in all the seasons. This makes it more profitable for the ships to lay down their anchors. Here, Kubaer was a trader King and people were happy with his rule. Raavan won Kubaer's confidence and even decreased the profit allowance to be paid to Dashrath, the Emperor of Sapt Sindhu. As a result, there was a war of Kharachpa in which traders turned warriors - Kubaer and Raavan won the battle. There are various trading places mentioned in this Literature namely, Sapt Sindhu, Chilka lake, and Nicobar Islands which is an important sea English route to South - east Asia. This shows that literature acts as a mirror to know about various places in India famous for trading.



Traders like Kubaer, Krakachavahu, Akampana and Raavan were smart in their business tactics and even resorted to smuggling to gain profit in lump sum. They became famous because of their trading tactics. The people used to call Raavan a trader- prince and he also liked it. To earn more wealth through trade and commerce was the main aim of Raavan and he got the secret of the superfast ship of Akampana that he bought from him. Akampana told Raavan, “ There is a special material that has to be ground and mixed with oil - an oil from Mesopotamia - and rubbed on the hull once every twenty years,” said Akampana, “ It keeps barnacles and other sea creatures away. It’s as simple as that.” Raavan immediately set a meeting with the owners of the cave material and bought the cave material from the Malyaputras on the pretext of using it in Pushpak Vimaan so that it can be used for trading purposes. A shrewd trader, he did not let his secret out. ‘Raavan had guessed that the Malyaputras were not aware that the cave material helped prevent biofouling on ships or they would have been using it on their own vessels... If it went well, he would be the only one with the competitive advantage of superfast ships.’ (Raavan - Enemy of Aryavarta)

Real Trading

The common thing about all the traders is that they can go to any extent to earn profits. Raavan tried to gain more profits by making his ship superfast and on the other hand, Kubaer also said no to any opportunity for making profits. Raavan overtook Lanka from Kubaer and became the King of Lanka. Through trade and commerce, Raavan transformed his life from rags to riches. Lanka focused all its resources on two fronts: trade and warfare. Most of the Lankans prefer either to become businessmen or warriors. They had to import foodgrains from Sapt Sindhu as Lanka did not grow foodgrains. They used to import high quality and cheap foodgrains from Sapt Sindhu and they focussed on warfare or trade. The traders of Lanka did not offer any resistance to the Ayodhyan navy. On the contrary, the Lankan businessmen understood that it is useless to offer resistance. Instead, they felt it was better to surrender to the invaders. We can see from the extract given in the Series that Lankans were traders and businessmen to the core.

“ True to its mercantile spirit, senior officials from the Gokarna trading guilds had gathered at the main port quay to welcome the Ayodhyan navy. Businessmen in this Lankan port city were determined to remain pragmatic. To business-focused minds, everything is negotiable.” Lankans were worried about their trade and business. They took the situation from the business point of view. They did not want to suffer any loss. So when the Ayodhyans invaded Gokarna, ‘the Gokarna trading guilds allowed the soldiers free passage to Sigiriya in return for their safety and security.’ They allowed the soldiers to pass from there but being the businessmen they also asked for their safety and security in return. In Lanka, women were also active in business. Cotton and Silk Guild was the richest guild in Gokarna and the senior managing partner of the guild was a woman whose name was Manigrama.

“Most manufacturers, merchants and traders across the Indian subcontinent were organised into guilds: essentially corporations composed of members pursuing a common craft or trade.” (War of Lanka, 174)

Those who wanted to join guild as an apprentice and through amassing a lot of profits, they attained higher positions of managers, ship captains and then partners. Then an election was held every two years and five managing partners were elected by the members. The annual profits were distributed to each member. They had an office where all the accounts were kept for all to refer to. They also built their in-house militia to guard their ships or even they took the help of the Lankan army. Thus, to attain and to protect the profits were the motives of the traders.

Conclusion

We get all the information about the trade, business, import, export, and the other aspects from the literature. Amish Tripathi in his Ramchandra Series has deeply dealt with all the aspects of trade and commerce and answered all the questions related to it in a very practical way. Amish Tripathi has used literature as a mirror to show trade and commerce and its variables in an amazing form. He did not forget to show that even the female group was active in this field thus, showing the mirror to the society that trade and commerce is not only confined to the menfolk but it can also be competently handled by the female group. Amish Tripathi through Ramchandra Series has explored the ways to tackle the economical problem tactfully and one can rise from rags to riches, from follower to a leader and from leader to an emperor. The ancient trade and commerce aspects have been widely and minutely explained. He has dealt with various situations in a positive manner to come out of any problem related to the business and it has taught the upcoming businessmen or business women to refer to his literary work to get the transparent and clear solution of all the economical problems.

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