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The progressive pilgrim: Real and mythical Indian geography in contemporary retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*

João Pedro Oliveira

Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC), Faculty of Human Sciences (FCH) of the Catholic University of Portugal (UCP), Lisbon, Portugal

Correspondence
João Pedro Oliveira, Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC), Faculty of Human Sciences (FCH) of the Catholic University of Portugal (UCP), Lisbon, Portugal.
Email: john.olivetree@gmail.com

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Abstract

Several English-language adaptations of the Indian epic Rāmāyaṇa have been published since the beginning of the 21st century. The epic has been regarded and recreated as a metonym for the Indian nation. Contemporary versions have often referred to Indian geography and have tried to poetically or literally associate mythic spaces with real ones. In this paper, I use discourse analysis in order to study some of the most influential 21st-century English-language retellings of the Rāmāyaṇa. I conclude that these and other versions of the epic describe India as a regionally divided nation which can ultimately be united through national geography, its association with mythology and the contrast between the geography of India and that of foreign nations. In this sense, I regard these contemporary versions as a 'literary pilgrimage' through which Indian readers can get to know the geography of their nation and regard it as sacred.

KEYWORDS
cartography, Hindu nationalism, Hinduism, mythological fiction, Orientalism, *Rāmāyaṇa*

1 | INTRODUCTION

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, one of the two epics of India, is one of the most important tales for Indian and Hindu culture. It has been adapted for various media and for different religious, moral, political and entertainment purposes by diverse Indian identity groups. Even though versions differ in perspective and detail, they follow the same structure. They focus on Rāma, the son of the king of the northern Indian kingdom of Ayodhyā. Sītā, Rāma's wife, is abducted by Rāvaṇa, the king of the southern kingdom of Laṅkā. Rāma travels south in order to rescue his wife. This summary reveals the relationship between the epic and Indian geography, as it describes, compares and contrasts India from north to south.

In the 20th century, particularly after India became independent, the *Rāmāyaṇa* gained an important pan-Indian sociopolitical dimension. In 1957, the epic was adapted into English by statesman Chakravarti Rajagopalachari. Despite his prominent career in politics, Rajagopalachari (1968) said that adapting the epics was the best service he rendered to 'his people' (p. 7), as the tales embodied India's 'national' character (p. 8). Rajagopalachari's version is still widely read today.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* was one of the many stories adapted to an English-language comic version by *Amar Chitra Katha* (ACK), a publishing house founded in 1969 by Anant Pai. Pai became worried that children in the 1960s knew about British culture better than they knew about the Indian one. He launched the publishing house in order to revert this situation. Deepa Sreenivas (2010), a professor of Gender Studies, has stated that, during her childhood, ACK has taught her the hegemonic 'facts' about India, that is, the idea she took for granted as everybody's idea of the country and which has remained with her after she forgot the material from history books (p. 2). The ACK comics also remain popular.

Ramanand Sagar's TV series *Ramayan* (1987–1988) has been a major influence on contemporary Indian society. In the political realm, the series created a centralised hegemonic version of the epic which became instrumental in fuelling Hindu nationalism, given that it helped in establishing the Delhi-centred, Hindi language middle-class medium across India (Kanjilal, 2017, p. 11). Descriptions have pointed to the popular and ritualistic dimension of the series, with viewers performing religious functions while watching it (Ibid., p. 98) and cities becoming empty during its broadcasting (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 84). Since its transmission, the series has been rebroadcast often, most notably during the COVID lockdown, when it reached new viewership records (Patel & Binjola, 2021).

The *Rāmjanmabhūmi* ('the place of the birth of Rāma') movement has been one of the most significant events in contemporary India (Nandy et al., 1995). This movement identified the birthplace of the character with the modern city of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. According to many Hindus, Rāma was born in a spot where there was a mosque called Babri, reportedly built by Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire. The movement aimed at tearing down the mosque and building a Hindu temple there. The *Ramayan* series was indirectly linked to the 1992 demolition of the mosque, with the main cast aiding in the propaganda surrounding the event. The movement also coincided with the 1991 neoliberal reforms, which brought about major economic, political and social changes to Indian society (Oza, 2006). These changes, such as the emergence and cultural empowerment of a new middle class educated on English language and globalised knowledge and interested on revitalising native Indian culture, are still felt nowadays (Fernandes, 2006).

In 2019, after a three decade-long judicial battle which opposed Hindu and Muslim claims, the *Rāmjanmabhūmi* case was solved in favour of the Hindus (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020, p. 257). In the same year, the Bollywood film *Ram ki Janmabhoomi* fictionalised the controversy. In the film, Muslims are represented as ruthless attackers who destroy Hinduism, and Hindus are represented as peaceful and legitimate defenders who, following the stereotyped representation of Hinduism as tolerant and inclusive, wish to peacefully include their Muslim brothers in the building of the temple. Even though fictional, the film emphasises the nonfiction judicial sentence.

Due to the tensions brought about by the movement, the *Rāmāyaṇa* faded momentarily after the 1990s. Nevertheless, due to widespread acceptance of Hindu nationalism, the story has re-emerged in the 21st century. English-language author Ashok Banker (2003–2012) published several novels on the epic. Virgin Comics published a

futuristic comic retelling titled *Rāmāyan 3392 A. D* (2006–2008). These versions are in tune with the neoliberal reforms. They are characterised by Westernised and globalised elements, particularly by influences such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the *Star Wars* franchise and Marvel and DC Comics graphic novels (Lutgendorf, 2007, p. 123). Such adaptations have aimed at stylistically turning the *Rāmāyaṇa* from a pan-Indian discourse into a universal one, while maintaining its conceptual 'Indianness', much like Hindu nationalist discourses have done.

The literary market of the *Rāmāyaṇa* grew exponentially after 2010. Most adaptations have been penned by authors who grew up on the 20th-century versions I have mentioned and who began their professional lives following the 1991 neoliberal reforms. Some have been commercially successful and have catapulted their authors to national fame, turning them into Indian and Hindu spokespersons for their fellow middle-class English-speaking countrymen living in India and abroad. Popular among these are Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The works by these authors are often discussed in newspaper articles, social media, online stores and video-sharing platforms, which feature reviews and interviews/talks given by the authors on their views on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Indian mythology, India and Hinduism.

Despite the fact that they all rewrite Indian myths, these authors are different in their approaches. According to E. Dawson Varughese (2017), a professor of English Studies, Tripathi is one of the founders of 'postmillennial mythological fiction' (p. 461). After *Shiva trilogy* (2010–2013), his first venture into mythological literature, Tripathi wrote a tetralogy on the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2015–2022). The author invariably celebrates the Indian and Hindu past(s). In his view, India was a great nation which declined due to foreign (Muslim and British) influence. Given that this discourse is similar to Hindu nationalistic ones, the author has been endorsed by prominent Hindutva figures. The covers of his *Rāmāyaṇa* adaptions include praise by current Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, who stated that Tripathi's writings have generated curiosity about India's rich past (Tripathi, 2015).

Neelakantan reverses the mainstream views of the mythological stories (those by Rajagopalachari, ACK and Sagar). His main discursive technique involves turning the traditional heroes into villains and vice-versa. Neelakantan has interpreted the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a story in which Rāvaṇa's liberal 'Dravidian' kingdom was destroyed by Rāma's illiberal 'Aryan' one. As the praise section in Neelakantan's novels shows, these narrative reversals may feel new to north Indians. One reviewer writes that Neelakantan makes the reader question everything one has been taught (quoted in Neelakantan, 2013). While this review is alluring from a marketing perspective, similar interpretations existed in South India before Neelakantan popularised them in English-language pop culture versions.

Tripathi and Neelakantan have tried to explain how supernatural elements of the epic may be related to historical truth. While Neelakantan has not been regarded as nationalistic as Tripathi, many of his discourses overlap with Hindu nationalistic ones. In an interview promoting his *Rāmāyaṇa* adaptation *Vanara: The Legend of Bali*, *Sugreeva and Tara* (2018), which also imagines a subaltern mythic kingdom as proto-neoliberal, Neelakantan defended that '[t]here were no heroes or villains in Puranas, this concept existed after Muslim and British invasions'.[1] The discourse that there were inclusive and tolerant Indian and Hindu cultures before the arrival of 'foreigners' with a dualistic Abrahamic mindset and that it is imperious to go back to 'pure' Hindu times is common in *Hindutva* circles. Neelakantan therefore conflates peripheral Indian narratives, which he transmits as being his own inventions, with the inclusive and tolerant features of India as a civilisation shaped by Hinduism.

Pattanaik rewrites versions of Indian myths, to which he appends personal explanations/interpretations. While Tripathi and Neelakantan have been regarded as fiction writers, Pattanaik has been regarded as a nonfiction writer. The author is known for making psychological interpretations. This focus on psychology and nonfiction aims at legitimating Pattanaik's discourse as factual. In Pattanaik's view, the psychological approach is the traditional Indian one and is superior to Western materialism, which is represented as its antithesis. According to the author, the latter approach has influenced Hindu nationalistic discourse. For this reason, Pattanaik often criticises *Hindutva*, the BJP and Modi. In return, he has been criticised by authors regarded as *Hindutva*, most notably activist Rajiv Malhotra, who has uploaded a video on *YouTube* titled '[d]emolishing Devdutt Pattanaik Point by Point in detail'.[2] Despite such critiques, Pattanaik's descriptions of Indian epistemology as one with 'psychological', intemporal and universal validity above the physical, ephemeral and local validity of 'foreign' ideas may also be regarded as nationalistic.

Divakaruni, a diasporic author who lives in America, reinterprets mythology through a feminist and (neo-)Orientalist lens. Divakaruni's India is an exotic dreamlike land ruled by men. However, while the land may be oppressive for women, Divakaruni turns her mythic women into modern feminist characters with independent minds and great mental strength. The categories of feminism and (neo-)Orientalism are not mutually exclusive. In fact, there is a whole market of English-language chick-lit literature about strong women in oppressive African and Asian lands.

While Divakaruni is more concerned with oppressed (Indian) women than with the Indian nation and the Hindu religion, the fact that she adopts modernised Orientalist views on India and Hinduism means that such views may singularise India and Hinduism as unique cultural entities. In her works, as in the works of the three male authors, the India of the near past may have decayed and such decadence may have allowed it to be physically and psychologically conquered by other nations. However, native wisdom and the strong and resourceful mythic female characters of the deep past provide ideas to make India and women free and modern in the present and near future.

Given the interest in representing India and Hinduism, as well as the relationship between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Indian geography, how have the contemporary retellers of the *Rāmāyaṇa* defined India as a geographical entity and as a nation? In order to answer this question, I analyse the works by these authors through the prism of discourse analysis. I punctuate my analysis with quantitative data based on the number of uses of keywords related to the semantic fields of patriotism and nationalism. These terms may be understood as similar or as different. Philosopher Simon Keller (2012) defines patriotism and nationalism as the expression of love towards a nation with positive and negative social outcomes, respectively. A patriot wants his nation to prosper, while a nationalist wants it to dominate all other nations (p. xiii). This framework would probably work in most Western contexts. However, philosopher Jun-Hyeok Kwak (2015) writes that in the East Asian context, the terms are indistinguishable. One could ask whether this would also apply to South Asia. While there are ontological lines dividing Indian secularists and Hindu nationalists, both have the same anti-colonial origin (Nandy, 2003, p. 108) and regard the stereotypically inclusive and tolerant Indian (Hindu?) approach as a role model (van der Veer, 2019, p. 46). As it is difficult to ascertain whether any given author is merely patriotic or sometimes straddles into outspoken nationalism, I use both terms interchangeably.

The idea of 'banal nationalism' concocted by social psychologist Michael Billig (1995) is also helpful to understand Indian nationalism. In Billig's view, nationalism does not refer only to phenomena related to extreme right ideologies manifested through flag waving. It is a pervading mood which may manifest itself in 'unwaved flags'. Even though Billig studies Western societies, this kind of banal nationalism is also evident in postcolonial ones. In Asia, the discourse that such societies are (spiritually) superior to the West has existed since anti-colonial times (Shani & Kibe, 2019, p. 2). While the authors I analyse do not explicitly state that India will physically conquer the world, they often claim some kind of superiority (Spiritual? Psychological? Mythical? Epistemological?) and it is implied that, at least on these fields, India could be a role model for the globalised world. It is because of this subtlety of substituting physical conquest by 'spiritual' ones that many nationalist discourses may appear under a patriotic disguise.

The selected works are Neelakantan's (2012) *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, Pattanaik's (2013) *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, Tripathi's (2015) *Ram: Scion of Ikshvaku* and Divakaruni's (2019) *The Forest of Enchantments*. I have chosen these because they are the first and, according to social media and online stores, the most popular adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by each author. *The Forest of Enchantments* is Divakaruni's only adaptation of the epic. My hypothesis is that, despite different intentions, the fact that these authors use similar symbols and stereotypes related to India and Hinduism means that they can be read together and received as authors fomenting banal Hindu nationalism. All regard India and Hinduism as unique cultural phenomena and imagine India as a geographically and culturally unified entity different from what lies across its borders. Hindu nationalism therefore works as an ideology which may absorb Hindu discourses which are not necessarily nationalistic and nationalistic discourses which are not necessarily Hindu.

I begin by dealing with how the *Rāmāyaṇa* serves as a medium to spread patriotic discourses. Next, I discuss how the retellings create representations of a safe central space, uncertain borders and dangerous spaces beyond those borders. I analyse how such discourses mirror real Indian preoccupations. In the third section, I analyse descriptions of India as a socially divided nation in a north–south axis and how such divisions are integrated into a national whole. Finally, I discuss the issue of mapping India from colonial to postcolonial times and how the maps used by the retellers encode and reflect the discourses identified in the previous sections.

2 | NATIONALISM AND SPACE IN *RĀMĀYAṆA* RETELLINGS

The retellers of the *Rāmāyaṇa* often use anachronistic terms to refer to Indian geography. Tripathi (2015) and Neelakantan (2012) write the name 'India' to designate the place in which the action of the *Rāmāyaṇa* takes place. They use this term (or the adjective *Indian*) 85 and 77 times, respectively. Even though Divakaruni (2019) never writes these terms, she writes the term *country*. The term feels odd when applied to the temporal plane of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Perhaps there is transference from the term *deśa*, which means 'place, territory, kingdom' in Sanskrit and 'country, nation' in Hindi. Pattanaik (2013) is the only reteller who writes neither the terms *India/Indian* nor *country* during the narrative.

Tripathi (2015) mentions other names for the modern nation. He mentions the *jambu* fruit (Sanskrit for 'rose-apple', *Syzygum cumini*), and how it has been consecrated with the ancient name for India, *Jambudvīpa* (p. 178), the name Tripathi gives to the subcontinent in the map of India reproduced in the novel. As the Sanskrit place name *Jambudvīpa* means 'island (*dvīpa)* of the rose apples', the opposite is true. Another name for India often used by Tripathi (74 times) is *Sapta sindhu*, Sanskrit for 'seven rivers', an epithet that often appears in the *Ṛgveda* and is therefore imbued with a sense of ancientness and sacredness. In the novel, *Sapta sindhu* is identified as the land that lies north to the Narmada River (p. 5), which flows through Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The use of such names with a long cultural history and their mixture with contemporary ideas regarding nationalism has the goal of envisioning the Indian nation as one which existed in the Vedic past. Tripathi and other retellers therefore create a patriotic discourse in which the geographical, historical and cultural idea of India as an ancient/intemporal nation-state is legitimised.

Patriotism is indeed an important topic for most authors, mostly for Tripathi and Neelakantan. Neelakantan (2012) writes most of his fiction according to a definite narrative structure: a charismatic subaltern character aware of the physical and moral degradation of his society decides to launch a popular and utopian revolution to change society for the best, gathering other idealistic heroes and opposing morally degraded villains along the way. Many of the titles of the 65 chapters of his first novel point to issues related to the semantics of nationalism applied to this narrative structure, a technique which closely mirrors contemporary populist discourses. While Neelakantan is just writing fiction and not calling out for physical war, he and other retellers constantly create an ontological rift between an imagined community of Us (the people, the authentic Indians) against Them (the corrupted elites, foreigners or 'inauthentic' Indians). Some of Neelakantan's chapters are titled as such (chapter number between brackets):

1. War: 'Captives' (p. 3), 'Devil's Raid' (6), 'Lore of the Losers' (7), 'Looming War' (44), 'War Without Ethics' (46), 'Victors and Their Ways' (61);
2. Betrayal: 'Traitor' (11), 'Betrayal' (14);
3. Revolution: 'Revolutionaries' (22), 'Revolution Comes Home' (23), 'Death of a Revolutionary' (24), 'Riot' (34);
4. Leadership and Heroism: 'The Untouchable King' (26), 'A Country Thanks its Hero' (36), 'A Hero Returns' (51), 'End of an Idealist' (54), 'Did I Fail as a King?' (58);
5. Patriotism: 'Patriot' (32), 'For My People' (46); and
6. Martyrdom: 'Funeral of Martyrs' (57).

The protagonists in Neelakantan and Tripathi's works often reveal patriotic pride. Neelakantan's (2012) Rāvaṇa states that he feels proud of his people, race, culture and language (p. 38). In Tripathi's (2015) novel, when asked whether he is ready to forge a new India, Rāma states that this is his duty to his 'motherland', that great country of his (p. 94). Later, Rāma kneels down, picks up a handful of soil and smears it on his forehead, whispering: '[m]ay the land of our ancestors… the soil that was witness to great karma… bless us' (p. 324). Sage Vasiṣṭha also states that:

> My great country must be rejuvenated with the blood and sweat of patriots. This soil is worth more than my life to me. I love my country. I love my India.
>
> (p. 39)

In this passage, as is often the case in nationalistic discourses, there are associations between human groups and cultural phenomena and between the land and its human inhabitants. Human 'blood' and 'sweat' merge with the 'soil'.

In Tripathi's novel, the *asuras*, a mythological species usually represented as evil, are represented as nationalistic. They state that India is their 'holy land' and that they cannot be happy outside its 'sacred embrace' (p. 198). The phrase 'Holy Land' has been more often used in languages associated with the Abrahamic religions (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic) to refer to a place in the Middle East. There is an implicit association between the nationalistic enemies of the epic with the Muslim and Christian British. However, there is also a Hindu idea of India as a 'holy land', which is how the Sanskrit term *Āryāvarta* is often translated into English. Etymologically, *Āryāvarta* means 'abode of the noble (people)'. The translation of *Āryāvarta* as 'holy land' shows how the concept was influenced by discourses related to Abrahamic religions and how Hindu nationalism has advocated for Indian and Hindu uniqueness while silently framing such uniqueness according to non-Indian and non-Hindu concepts. Notably, Tripathi's (2019) third instalment of the *Rāmāyaṇa* series is titled *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*, that is, 'Rāvaṇa: Enemy of North India'.

3 | CENTRES AND BORDERS

The patriotic importance of the land of India is often translated into spatial discourses related to a safe civilised centre contrasted to dangerous uncivilised borders. In old and contemporary *Rāmāyaṇas*, disputes between groups occur in liminal spaces associated with natural features. Divakaruni (2019) calls the forests which limit the kingdom 'forest-borders' (p. 69). Neelakantan and Tripathi also mention mountain ranges and rivers, as the term *Sapta Sindhu* suggests. Pattanaik (2013) writes about rivers as dividing nature from culture or the realm of humans from the realm of animals (p. 89).

Natural borders also distinguish between places inhabited by different human (oid) groups. This tendency is most explicit in Divakaruni's (2019) novel. King Janaka, Sītā's father, is often exhorted to line out the borders of the kingdom in order to protect it from *rākṣasas* (8), a species of malevolent beings often conflated with the *asuras*. King Daśaratha sends his son Rāma to the northern borders to settle a land dispute between tribes (p. 93). Bharata and Śatrughna, Rāma's half-brothers, are stationed in the borderlands in order to keep an eye on 'wild tribes' (p. 302). Finally, when Rāma is made king, he deals with the 'troubles' at the borders (p. 312). Borders are therefore places where two identities clash and social tensions rise. I am not implying that Divakaruni, who is not explicitly interested on matters of territorial integrity, is being nationalistic in a premeditated way. By defining the central known world of the protagonists and the peripheric unknown world of the exotic *Other*, she takes up an old mythic idea and colours it with (neo-)Orientalist ideas of exoticism coupled with fear of the unknown. However, a few ideas relate Divakaruni's discourse to banal nationalism: (1) the similarity between this mythic pattern, the Western Orientalist one and nationalistic discourses on borderlands; (2) the fact that Divakaruni does nothing to oppose such stereotypes and adopts them as they are; (3) the fact that many postcolonial nations like India have troublesome borders

which, in social terms, differ greatly from the 'heart' of the nation; and (4) the fact that Divakaruni's work gets associated with avowedly patriotic works through by being part of the wider genre of 'mythological fiction', which often spreads patriotic ideas.

Similar hints of the necessity to defend borders appear in other retellings. In Neelakantan's (2012) novel, savage tribes are said to raid the frontier towns of the Indus plains (p. 52). In Tripathi's (2015) version, Śatrughna states that government is needed to provide an army to protect borders from attacks (p. 84). The fact that Tripathi uses modern terms like 'government', 'army' and 'external attack' shows that, contrary to Divakaruni, he does not aim at creating a fantasy world where the monstrous unknown lurks beyond the known borders. He is describing the real preoccupations of contemporary nation-states.

The distinction between centre and periphery also exists in cultural spaces. In his novels, Neelakantan (2012) mentions that lower castes and classes live in slums on the outskirts of cities (p. 95). Atikāya, one of Rāvaṇa's sons, is said to have been born 'in the wrong side of the city' (p. 424), that is, far from the centre, where the higher castes and classes live. Tripathi (2015) states that even animals stay away from the boundaries of a hermitage, given that in the centre, they may defend themselves better (p. 177).

To understand how these tropes are reflected in reality, one may look at the most politically problematic places in contemporary India. Most are located near national borderlands: Punjab, Kashmir, the north-eastern states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura) and the maritime border between Sri Lanka and India. Paula Banerjee (2010), whose work has dealt with the condition of Indian women near the Indian borders, has stated that whenever states create borders, they also create 'bordered existences' (p. 228). In myth and reality, the centre is conflated with safety, humanity and culture, while the periphery is conflated with danger, bestiality and nature.

The tendency to associate borderlands with animality is most evident in Tripathi's (2015) universe. In his novels, the *Nāgas* are a mysterious race 'of people born with deformities' (pp. 5/80) who come from the borderlands. They are said to be hated, feared and ostracised (Ibid.). In this novel, Jaṭāyu, a semi-divine bird who in most retellings tries to save Sītā when she is abducted by Rāvaṇa, is a *Nāga*. While Jaṭāyu is often described as a vulture, here, he is a human whose deformities make him look like a vulture. He has a hard and bony mouth like a bird's beak and fine and downy hair-like feathers. Jaṭāyu is called a *vulture-man* by Lakṣmaṇa, Rāma's half-brother, who is said to hold superstitions against the *Nāgas* and to be unable to trust them (pp. 333–334).

In Sanskrit, *nāga* means 'snake'. *Nāga* is also the name of a mythical kingdom and its people. Although the terms are not etymologically related, Naga is the name of an ethnic group that lives in the northeastern state of Nagaland. In a travelogue, author Jonathan Glancey (2012) has written that Nagaland has been portrayed as a land of ruthless guerrillas and exotic natives, a similar description to Tripathi's *Nāgas*. It is unlikely that Tripathi's readership is aware of the different etymological roots of the terms. Such descriptions of demythologised species may be conflated with existing groups which have been depicted in similar ways in Orientalist literature and modern Indian imagination.

4 | UNITED AND DIVIDED INDIA IN THE *RĀMĀYAṆA*

4.1 | United India

In the retellings, the concept of 'India' and its different epithets work as geographical, historical and cultural unifiers. According to Pattanaik (2013), the epics cover 'the length and breadth of India' (p. 104), given that the *Rāmāyaṇa* follows a vertical axis and the *Mahābhārata* a horizontal one. Neelakantan (2012) often covers such length and breadth by referring to the country's 'natural' borders. Rāma is said to roam all over India (p. 300), and Rāvaṇa is said to rule over the whole country, here called a 'holy land' (p. 35). When Rāvaṇa hears that there are great nations to the north, he states:

> I would travel across the length and breadth of India. I wanted to climb the snow clad mountains of the Himalayas, swim against the dangerous currents of the Ganga raging in her full monsoon fury. I dreamed of passing through the thick forests of the Vindhya and Sahyas.
>
> (p. 17)

When Rāvaṇa embarks on his flying chariot, he feels proud to see 'India' laying down below 'with her riches and sorrows' (p. 290). He again mentions the Himalayas and the Ganges River and states that they belong to his people, and he wishes to throw the *devas*, mythological beings often represented as good, back to the wilderness beyond the Indus River (Ibid.). The Himalayas in the north, the sea in the south (p. 322), the Indus River in the west and the Brahmaputra River in the east (p. 21) are often mentioned as the borders of India.

Even though scholarship and fiction are supposed to follow different approaches, scholars and fiction writers often rationalise the fantasy elements within the epic and extract historical knowledge from them. Some try to conflate the described placenames with existing geographical spaces (Goldman, 1986). Historian Romila Thapar (2014) states that the attempt to historicise Indian mythology and find places associated with it is a recent phenomenon and that in the pre-modern past, the locations of myths were vague (pp. 116–126). *Localising* is therefore a contemporary strategy informed by a Western rational and materialistic epistemological worldview through which the virtual epic acquires scientific legitimacy.

The evidence for *Rāmjanmabhūmi*, for instance, has been defended in the public arena by historians and archaeologists with academic credentials. Indian and Hindu Historian Meenakshi Jain (2017) states that there is no evidence of continued Muslim occupation of the Babri mosque, while the uninterrupted presence of Hindu devotees is attested by several sources (p. 144). This view is endorsed by Hindu nationalists, including Western scholars (see Elst, 2002), who are often quoted by Indian authors. Others defend less Hindu-centred arguments. In a paper signed by several Indian scholars (Gopal et al., 1990), the authors show that (1) archaeological and textual evidence shows that modern Ayodhya cannot be identified with the mythic one; (2) local worship of Rāma was not as modern as Hindu nationalists claim; (3) the Babri mosque was not built over the birthplace of Rāma; and (4) there was no enmity between Hindus and Muslims in the deep past.

Due to this controversy arising from the rationalisation of mythic spaces, Pattanaik (2013) goes on the defensive and ascribes a psychological dimension to Ayodhyā and other placenames. Similarly, Ashok Banker (2013) states that Ayodhyā is not a place in Uttar Pradesh but a place 'in our hearts', where 'temples' have the ability to live forever in a way that no physical temples are able to. The idea that 'God lives in the heart, not in temples' was the most common line found in letters written by the general public to various Indian newspapers during the *Rāmjanmabhūmi* movement (Viswananth, 1998, p. 172). This shows how 'psychological' interpretations easily dismiss physical consequences.

Pattanaik (2013) states that many scholars have challenged Laṅkā's common identification with Sri Lanka, given that the island was formerly known as Sinhala and was called Laṅkā only in the 12th century. According to him, the clues in the canonical *Rāmāyaṇa* suggest an area in the Deccan plateau (pp. 137–138). Probably, most Indians and non-Indians think that Laṅkā and Sri Lanka refer to the same space. Perhaps they think that Sri Lanka was called Laṅkā since Rāvaṇa's time and not that the modern island is called Sri Lanka due to its association with the myth. There are Sri Lankan discourses defending the former idea (Henry, 2022).

In most contemporary retellings of the epic (Neelakantan is the exception), the northern city of Ayodhyā is a culturally advanced city whose inhabitants are humane, while the southern city of Laṅkā is a technologically advanced yet inhumane city. The association of Ayodhyā with a native Indian space and its inhabitants and the association of Laṅkā with foreign spaces and foreigners may lead to transference of physical and behavioural traits applied to mythic and real groups.

Despite the fact that Pattanaik (2013) emphasises that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and his own interpretations are psychological, the author lists the pilgrimage sites where the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are believed to have taken place (p. xxi). Ayodhyā and Laṅkā are the most prominent examples. Others include Sītāmaḍhaḍhī, Bihar; Nāśika, Maharashtra;

Rāmēcuvaram, Tamil Nadu; Hajazārībāga, Jharkhand; Simlipāla, Odisha; Lepākṣi, Andhra Pradesh; Maṃḍora, Rajasthan; Hampī, Karnataka; Badrīnātha, Uttarakhand; Ṛṣikeśa, Uttarakhand; and Bānda, Uttar Pradesh. Pattanaik includes other placenames in long enumerations. Sometimes, he mentions different possibilities in relation to a single event. According to him, there are places associated with one specific event in Karnataka, Kerala and Assam (p. 178). In short, the author describes the geographical totality of India.

Pattanaik also mentions general and specific spots. General ones include the many caves in which Rāma is said to have rested during exile (p. 114) or the *Rāmacaraṇacinha* ('footprints of Rāma') revered by pilgrims (pp. 59/96) (see Bose, 2020). An important specific feature is the *Rāma setu* (Rāma's bridge), a stretch of limestone shoals connecting South India and Sri Lanka. Pattanaik states that, while many have tried to break this barrier in order to facilitate maritime trade, the project has had opponents who have regarded the 'bridge' as a sacred monument (p. 209; see also Subramaniam, 2019: ch. 3). In English, the site is better-known as Adam's Bridge due to the association between Adam and the island of Sri Lanka (Lopez, 2013). In Hinduism, it has been associated with the bridge that the *vānaras* (a monkey-like species which helps *Rāma* rescue Sītā) built in order to reach the island. Pattanaik claims that Sri Lankan historians have not endorsed such claims. As Sri Lanka is an independent nation-state with Buddhism as its major religion, stating that the bridge was built by a Hindu god from North India would be akin to saying that it was an Indian landmark.[3] Hindu Tamils have crossed to Sri Lanka through the maritime space between it and India. In association with the myth, the land bridge easily turns into a symbolic metonymy for the many historical crossings. While one cannot reduce the conflict which has affected Sri Lanka since the 20th century to one between Buddhism and Hinduism (or Islam), the progressive ontological merging of Buddhism, the 'national' religion of the majority, with the Sinhalese ethnic group and the Sinhalese language has conferred an ethnoreligious and ethnolinguistic dimension to it (Gier, 2016, pp. 45–66).

In 2022, Discovery Plus launched the documentary series *Legends of the Ramayana with Amish*.[4] In it, Tripathi travels to Indian and Sri Lankan locations in order to show their relationship to the *Rāmāyaṇa* or, as an official description of the series states, to map 'myth with geology, customs and belief'.[5] In a teaser, Tripathi introduces the series in a similar way when stating that he aims to explore 'the connection between mythology and geology'.[6]

Several places mentioned by Pattanaik overlap with those to where Tripathi travels. However, there is a crucial difference between this series and the retellings. The retellings are mostly textual, while the series relies mostly on visuals. A teaser filmed on location discusses the *Rāma setu*.[7] Tripathi points to the sea and states: 'there is a belief that there was a bridge here'. A pile of stones is shown. The author asks 'were these stones used to construct the Ram Setu?'. Attempting to legitimate the myth 'scientifically', he adds that 'corals also explain the floating stones'. Ritesh Arya (1968–), an Indian geologist and the invited 'expert' for this segment, concludes that 'this was an engineering marvel in the olden times'. In chapter 14 of Tripathi's (2022) *War of Lanka*, the last instalment of Tripathi's *Rāmāyaṇa* tetralogy, the characters discuss the 'scientific' construction of this bridge. They also mention the possibility that the floating rocks were corals and the fact that the bridge is so advanced that it looks natural. Similarly, the 2022 Bollywood film *Ram Setu*[8] tells the story of a sceptical Indian archaeologist who initially believes neither in the *Rāmāyaṇa* nor in the possibility that the Ram Setu was built by human (oid)s. On further investigation and through 'scientific' methods, he finds out that his beliefs are wrong. Nonfiction and fiction (as well as text, image and sound) work towards the legitimation of the same geohistorical argument.

Like Pattanaik, Tripathi (2015) often refers to placenames in his fiction, even though he changes them. This makes their association with real topography more difficult. The most notable examples are Karachapa, described as a port city with a fort and the place where Daśaratha fights Rāvaṇa for the first time (p. 7), and Pariha, described as the foreign land beyond the Western border of India (pp. 37/198).

The description and name of the Karachapa seem to refer to modern Karachi and its Manora Fort, built in 1797 and captured by the British in 1839 (Rustomji & Katrak, 2008). Rāvaṇa is said to dote the Indian peninsula with port forts (p. 321), just like the British did. The idea that Karachi is part of India (not of Pakistan) and the comparison of Rāvaṇa's actions with those of the British East India Company aim to show what India is and who the Indians and foreigners are. *Pariha* refers to Persia/Iran. While Tripathi's term resembles the Sanskrit one (*Pārasika*), it looks/

sounds more similar to the unrelated terms *parihā*, 'to omit, to neglect, to be deficient, to be inferior', and *pariah*, 'outcaste'. As Pariha is described as the land where the majority of the *asura* enemies (associated with the Muslims) live (p. 198), the land is associated with Islam. The partition between India and Pakistan has been regarded as a blotch in the history of Indian nationalism. Despite the religious division between the nations, Hindus, Tripathi included, have disregarded the Muslim majority in Pakistan and have regarded the nation as part of greater India. However, Persia/Iran, the land next to the Western border, is clearly represented as a foreign place.

4.2 | Divided India

There also exists a discourse on a geographically/socially divided India. As Pattanaik states, the retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have focused on distinctions in a north–south axis. These directions are symbolically meaningful. Pattanaik (2013) states that Rāvaṇa has been reviled as a demon and Kubera as a god (of wealth) because the former is associated with the south, which symbolises death, while the latter is associated with the north, which indicates permanence/stability (p. 50). Pattanaik adds that humans live in the north (*Āryāvarta*), the *demons* in the south (Laṅkā) and the *vānaras* between the human and devilish realm (Kiṣkindhā), a place which is as much geographical as psychological (p. 157). In Divakaruni's (2019) novel, king Daśaratha has a dream in which he rides a donkey towards the south. Astrologers prophesise that this is a portent of destruction, given that south is the direction of the kingdom of Yama (p. 93), the god of death. In Tripathi's (2015) version, Rāma states that, whenever 'India' faces an existential crisis, its regeneration/reform comes from the Indian peninsula, the land to the south of the Narmada River, which Tripathi calls the *Pitṛbhūmi*, 'land of the ancestors'. He calls the south a 'place of regeneration' because south is the direction of death, which non-Indians consider inauspicious and Indians consider auspicious, given that death makes regeneration possible (p. 325). The concepts of 'Indians' and 'foreigners' are therefore constructed as antithetical.

The north–south axis is also associated with ideas of ethnicity. The Orientalist distinction between the Aryan and Dravidian civilisations is as much ethnolinguistic as geographical, given that Aryans are considered to have conquered India from north to south and Dravidians to have fled in the same direction. The route of ancient pilgrimages in India has suggested corridors of contact between North and South India and the places located far away from these corridors have been said to be more prone to house forest dwellers (Bhardwaj, 1983, p. 225). Pattanaik (2013) mentions stories about sage Agastya, who features in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, moving from north to south. According to him, such stories suggest the migration of Vedic ideas and their transformation following contact with southern peoples (p. 114). In Pattanaik's tale, Rāma is instructed to go south so that his exile may let those who live in the forests (*rākṣasas*) 'expand their minds' (p. 111), a common psychological interpretation adopted in works by the author. The epic is therefore interpreted as a tale about of how civilisation spread from north to south, a process which has been called *Sanskritisation* (Srinivas, 2001).

Neelakantan (2012) also capitalises on geographical differences. In his novel, Rāma's missionary work from North to South India is not one of civilisation and enlightenment but one of barbarism and oppression. The novel is full of insults between North, Central and South Indians. Rāvaṇa speaks of Central India as a no man's land of shrubs, jungles and dunes (p. 290). After the conquest of Laṅkā by the *devas*, Bhadra, a poor outcaste and one of the narrators of the novel, finds refuge in a proto-communist kingdom in Central India. Resenting the presence of refugees, the locals start beating Bhadra with a stick and calling him a 'black south Indian'. It is said that the local forest dwellers hate North Indians even more and that regionalism makes the proto-communist empire crumble (p. 492). Even though more evident in Neelakantan's works, exotification on a north–south axis is present in other retellings. In Pattanaik's (2013) novel, when Sītā arrives in Laṅkā, everybody flocks to see the 'strange woman from the far north' (p. 146). Such differences explain why, in the view of Indologist Paula Richman (2008), southern retellings of the epic (and Neelakantan's novels) have tended to depict the humanoid species of the tale in a more humane light

than the northern versions (pp. 28/175), given that these groups have been identified with South Indian communities.

The tendency to depict conflict between North and South India has been constant in popular culture into the present. While such symbols come from ancient ideas and are sometimes influenced by Orientalist discourses, they are echoed in modern and supposedly less mythic cultural phenomena. Indologist Rachel Dwyer (2006) shows how Bollywood cinema depicts contemporary Hindus from South India as figures of fun (p. 141). A prime example is the 2013 Bollywood blockbuster *Chennai Express*,[9] which became one of the highest grossing Indian films ever. The film tells the story of a North Indian who mistakenly goes to Chennai, the capital of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, and falls in love with a local girl who has been promised by her father to a local man. By countering the contemporary ideal of love marriages and privileging political marriages, South India is described as lacking in modernity. Contrary to the main character, who is fair, tall, thin, neatly combed and shaved and handsome, South Indians, with the exception of the main female role and the main antagonist male role, are dark-skinned, short, fat, have long and dishevelled hair and beards, and look ugly. Such visual descriptions are identical to the descriptions of northerners and southerners in Neelakantan's (2012) retelling. In the film, south Indians rarely speak, given that they do not know the national language (Hindi) and their mother tongue (Tamil) is not commonly understood by northern audiences. They also often engage in violence. The antagonist is tall, handsome and muscled, but he rarely speaks. He is mostly seen with a furious look on his face and engaging in fighting.

In one scene, the protagonist gets lost in a forest, where he comes across an overweight, cross-eyed dwarf who speaks to him in animal-like sounds, mainly by using tongue clicks. The protagonist tries to imitate him. An excerpt uploaded on *YouTube* by the production company is titled 'Shah Rukh Khan [the main actor] tries to talk in Tamil'.[10] Languages with clicks exist only in southern Africa and are mostly associated with the Khoisan, who are sometimes derisively called the last 'primitive' people in the world. As this excerpt shows, the encounter between a tall and handsome Indo-European speaker from North India and a dwarfish and ugly Dravidian speaker from South India is the contemporary demythologised reflection of the encounters between the human and non-human or between the heroes and the enemies in the retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

5 | MAPPING INDIA

The fixation of the geographical idea of India was determined by the British colonial administration (Khilnani, 1997, p. 155). According to geographer Matthew Edney's (1997), Indian nationalists adopted the British concept and projected it millennia into the past, as if India's natural frontiers meant some kind of political unity (p. 16). Following this discourse, *Hindutva* pioneer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1969) wrote about Hindu and Hindustan as 'native terms' for the region between the Himalayas and the sea and about India as 'perfectly designed by the fingers of nature as a geographical unit' (p. 32).

The idea of a 'natural' map has been transposed into cultural ideas. Metaphors between the female body and India have been particularly plentiful (Ramaswamy, 2009; Lal, 2023, p. 158–171). The most influential representation of India as a natural space has been that of the nation as a motherly figure who, despite being helpless, cares for her children (the inhabitants) or who, being strong, arms her children to fight for the nation. The main object of devotion of a temple in Varanasi, the *Bhārata Mātā Mandir* (Temple of Mother India), consists of a map of 'Undivided India'.[11] In other common depictions, the association between land and femininity is more obvious. There are representations of Mother India overlapping with the map of India. She is usually represented with her arms wide open in order to receive the children of the nation. Sometimes, she holds an Indian flag (see cover of Ramaswamy, 2009).

During the 2014 general elections, when Narendra Modi was elected, similar campaign posters with Modi's figure superimposed over India's map appeared. In one picture,[12] Modi looks serene and inviting like Mother India and makes an auspicious V sign hand gesture, which stands for 'victory'. The personalisation of maps and the mapping of

human figures in India has therefore constituted a cohesive discursive language with clear narrative and visual symbols. Through them, imagined communities turn into real ones and real figures are imbued with a mythic aura.

The concept of mapping India has also been relevant for the contemporary retellers of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Neelakantan (2012, p. 6) places a fictional map of India before the beginning of the novel proper, Tripathi's official website shows maps related to his mythological series,[13] and Pattanaik has posted a 'Conceptual political map of India' on his social media.[14]

The heading of Neelakantan's map reads 'Ancient India at the Peak of Ravana's Asura Empire'. India is shown divided into several smaller territories, but one can make out the outermost borders of the modern country. What Neelakantan calls 'various DEVA kingdoms' (northwest) corresponds to the states where Indo-European languages are spoken. This region includes Rajasthan, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and also Pakistan. Not all such states are included. Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Sri Lanka fall within Rāvaṇa's kingdom. This means that this map represents the so-called *Sanskritisation* process by Rāma, who stands for the Indo-European invaders.

There are two small kingdoms inside the *Asura* empire: the proto-communist state, which is said to have been the original Dravidian empire, and the kingdom of the *vānaras*, who in this novel are mestizos born of the intermingling of *devas* and *asuras*. The former is located in Maharashtra. Kerala has been known for its communist political leanings (Nossiter, 1982) and is currently ruled by a Left coalition led by communists. The modern Communist Party of India consists of a merger of the Maharashtra Communist Party, disbanded in 1991, and the Kerala Communist Party, so it seems plausible that Neelakantan's map tries to mimic the near past. The inclusion of the *vānara* kingdom in modern Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh coincides with the idea that this is a liminal space between Indo-Europeans (*devas*) and Dravidians (*asuras*). According to accepted history, Indo-Europeans should be in the process of conquering the northernmost Dravidian territories. Nowadays, these states have official Dravidian languages (Kannada in Karnataka and Telugu in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh). These two languages have more influence from Sanskrit than the Dravidian languages to the south (Tamil and Malayalam). The monkey-like nature of the *vānaras* is therefore explained by the fact that they occupy a liminal civilisational place, one which mixes linguistic and cultural elements from North and South India.

The kingdoms surrounding India/Pakistan are populated by non-human species. The space occupied by the *yakṣas*, a class of mythological beings, corresponds to Afghanistan. The *gandharvas*, another class of mythological beings said to be the musicians of the gods, occupy a part of modern Nepal/Bhutan. There is a caste of professional Nepalese musicians called *Gandarbha* (Shahu, 2013). The *gandharvas* are therefore a mythic group that inspired an existing one and Neelakantan has re-mythicised the existing group. *Nāgas* occupy the northeastern states of India, including Nagaland, whose name is unrelated to the Sanskrit term *nāga*. However, this group is described as Indian, as its kingdom straddles into what would be modern West Bengal, Jharkand and Bangladesh. The *mlecchas*, a Sanskrit term for people who cannot speak that language, and the *kiṃnara*s, another mythical species of celestial musicians, are placed in modern Myanmar. There are many languages in Myanmar, and the Indo-European languages constitute a small group. Burmese, the official language, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family. The meaning of the term *kiṃnara*, Sanskrit for 'is this a man?', may be regarded as negative, as it refers to a less-than-human group living beyond the Indian borders. Finally, even though there are no names in modern China, its borders are also clear.

Contrary to Neelakantan, Tripathi specifies the period depicted in the map: India, 3400 BCE. The date is topped by an 'archaeological remain', a coin with some inscriptions from the Indus Valley Civilisation, which began around this time and whose hypothetical writing system remains undeciphered. The inscription possibly represents the way Tripathi imagines the anachronism 'India' would be written. In the process, this fuzzy time and place become organically integrated into the idea of contemporary India.

Tripathi's map has fewer names of kingdoms and places than Neelakantan's, but it includes rivers. While in Neelakantan's map, the borders between kingdoms are drawn, in Tripathi's, they are inexistant. There are no borders between India–Pakistan–Bangladesh and the surrounding countries, but the Indian subcontinent is dotted with small green points. Beyond those points, in what would be Afghanistan, China and Myanmar, there are only mountains.

Tripathi's map disguises the differences within the Indian territory, which would include Pakistan and Bangladesh, and, just like Savarkar did, emphasises the natural differences between this territory and the surrounding ones. As the caption 'India, 3400 BCE' reveals and as Tripathi (2017) often emphasises in nonfiction works, the cultural entity of India has existed for 'millennia'. The idea of ancientness is also emphasised by the design of the map. Unlike Neelakantan's map, which looks like a modern digital one, Tripathi's looks like an old handwritten parchment scroll. This means that this fictional map was made in the distant past and was likely unearthed in a library or archaeological dig.

Compared to the previous maps, the one made by Pattanaik looks like an abstract diagram. Without a label, it would be hard to realise that it represents India. Pattanaik turns the irregular international and interstate borders into straight lines and the states into geometric shapes. As the drawings in his works reveal, Pattanaik aims at simplification. His drawings usually consist of black-and-white pencil figures which suggest the human body and other shapes. Many are diagrams representing logical ideas. The geographic/temporal variations of the iconography of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and of Indian history and culture are stripped to their barest recognisable forms. In the process, the concept of India becomes geometrically and logically apprehensible. In fact, in a *Facebook* post, Pattanaik has written that the map may be used by students who wish to 'understand India'.[15]

6 | CONCLUSION

I have shown how the *Rāmāyaṇa* has somewhat functioned like travel literature in the 21st century. Contemporary versions of the epic define and describe several Indian places where the action occurs and makes them historically relatable to the contemporary nation-state. The concept of *pilgrimage literature* would also prove useful. The places, their canonisation as inherently Indian and their distinction from 'foreign' places evoke religious and patriotic devotion. Several scholars have dealt with the concept of *pilgrimage* in India (Bhardwaj, 1983; Feldhaus, 2003; Kinsley, 1998). Anne Feldhaus (2003), a professor of Religious Studies, has conducted research on how characters and events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* have been identified with places in the state of Maharashtra. She has remarked that such religious identifications have not straddled into politics. Perhaps this conclusion was true until some point. However, nowadays the idea of the centralisation of political power according to Hindu nationalistic ideology allows for the easy appropriation of religious phenomena for political purposes. The *Rāmāyaṇa* works as an effective medium to reach this goal, given that it defines who are the insiders and the outsiders in terms of geographical terms and, through association with geography, also in social, temporal and epistemological terms.

The most influential study about pilgrimage in India is *India: A Sacred Geography* by the Indologist Diana L. Eck (2013). Eck's work features a chapter titled 'Following Rāma: The *Rāmāyaṇa* on the Landscape of India', which analyses the pilgrimage sites related to the epic (pp. 399–440). According to the author, the imagined landscape cast by the network of India's sacred pilgrimage places drawn from the epic has contributed to the Indian sense of nationhood, given that they have created a geographic idea of India as a whole and organic and have defined what the centres and peripheries are. This means that myth-making and map-making have been a double-sided venture in India. The geographical and civilisational idea of India has stood in contrast to the ideas of the lands surrounding India and to civilisations which have 'invaded' its body and mind, such as the Muslim and British ones. This happens despite the fact that the English language, global genres (epic fantasy, self-help books, among others) and neo-Orientalist concepts influenced by the East–West encounter have constituted the preferred media for the creation and diffusion of 'native' ideas.

Imbuing space with a story related to memory and belief triggers emotion. Such stories may be real and remembered at the individual level or fictional and remembered at the collective level. The narrative manipulation of places for ideological purposes also manipulates collective emotions. In this sense, it is understandable why sociologist Satish Deshpande (2003) writes that pilgrimage has always involved questions of hegemony, power and territorial control (p. 93). The 'scientific', symbolic, psychological and neo-Orientalist literary pilgrimages made possible by

contemporary retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* associate mythic places with real ones. In the process, myth reflects and shape reality: mythic places are materialised and real places are mythicised. Readers stay still and may not even be present in their 'holy land'. However, they are able to travel through them in their minds, to imagine them as forming an ontological whole and to gain a sense of veneration for the memories they inspire. At the same time, while creating a cohesive national idea, social hierarchies based on geographical dichotomies such as centre/periphery and north/south arise. This means that, while every community residing within India is unambiguously Indian, some are represented as more Indian than others.

ORCID

João Pedro Oliveira https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2833-0418

ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bd1bSaVq870 (accessed on 9/6/2023).

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtkMFLuOa3M (accessed on 9/6/2023).

[3] See https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/indian-court-proceedings-to-declare-adams-bridge-as-indian-heritage/ (accessed on 16/7/2022).

[4] KULSHRESHTHA, Sujata & Tewari, Abhimanyu (Directors) (2022), *Legends of the Ramayana with Amish* [Series], Discovery Plus.

[5] https://www.discoveryplus.com/ph/show/the-legend-of-ramayana-with-amish-discovery-originals-ph (accessed on 24/2/2023).

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vb9dwelw4JE (accessed on 19/7/2022).

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Fn1Jec5b0k (accessed on 19/7/2022).

[8] SHARMA, Abhishek (Director) (2022), *Ram Setu*, Zee Studios.

[9] SHETTY, Rohit (Director) (2013), *Chennai Express*, UTV Motion Pictures.

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orNJEVGY4hY (accessed on 16/7/2022).

[11] *See* https://www.varanasi.org.in/bharat-mata-mandir-temple-Varanasi (accessed on 21/9/2021).

[12] https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/modi-clamps-kashmir-india-loves-64986105 (accessed on 12/7/2022).

[13] https://www.authoramish.com/ram-chandra-series-the-world/ (accessed on 12/7/2022).

[14] https://www.facebook.com/devduttmyth/posts/conceptual-political-map-of-india-not-drawn-to-scale-can-be-used-by-students-to-/3268174056528753/?_rdr (accessed on 12/7/2022).

[15] In another publication with a short video, Pattanaik explains how to use the map by pointing to the geometric shapes and stating which Indian state they refer to. See https://www.facebook.com/DevduttPattanaikFandom/videos/974072043043568 (accessed on 12/7/2022).

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