ADAPTATION OF EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY AND RICK RIORDAN'S KANE CHRONICLES TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

Rick Riordan's *Kane Chronicles Trilogy* uses Egyptian mythology in the most fascinating manner, which fires the attention and curiosity of the young minds. The paper evaluates the representation of both positive and negative energies in various gods from the ancient Egypt and explores how the author lets the young minds be influenced by its retellings. The paper concludes that Riordan's retellings have a very positive, moral and educational influence over the young minds since one of the most conspicuous themes of Egyptian mythology is the victory of goodness over evil.

Keywords: Egyptian mythology, Children's Literature, adaptation, gods, myth, magic

INTRODUCTION

Cambridge dictionary refers mythology to an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts. In view of this definition of mythology, stories in the past ages

including facts and events of people of that era are being talked about. These myths, in its adaptive form, hold a different value today. In fact, "Myths tend to be kind of stories that deal with such basic themes in such a dramatic way that one can read or listen to them over and over" (Ellwood 2009: 3). The present interpretations appeal the mind as they are based on a model in which myths are more individualized. David Leeming in his *Oxford Companion to World Mythology* has also explained mythology in terms of the sacred stories that are borne within its own cultural boundary (2005: xi-xii). He affirms that myths are not only culture specific but are universally recognized. Furthermore, "myths have had significant power to move people" (Leeming 2010: xvii-xviii). It was J.F Bierlein who also interpreted the value of these myths as "models of transcendence that help us find a means to transcend difficulties and sorrow and invest life with meaning" (1999:6).

G.S. Kirk points out in *Myth: Its meaning and functions in Ancient and other Cultures* that Greek mythology, which has been regarded as a "paradigmatic system", should not be considered the only source of valuable insights related to myths (1970:8). Though Greek myths provide the reference point for the studies based on mythology, myths of other cultures also hold power to mould and teach. Thus, if we talk about Egyptian mythology, it holds educative value for many, especially children, in its adaptive form. This is primarily because G.S. Kirk's observation that myths are not necessarily based on stories related to gods but its characters can also have an individual, "a hero, who may be something more than a man but falls far short of true divinity" (1970: 9). He also supported the fact that children like myths especially because the characters are not gods but individuals.

Children look for an identity as "Children receive an identity from their parents, yet strive to establish their own individuality" (J.F. Bierlein1999: 6).There are certain images in Egyptian mythology that are "used in art that have a power to affect the real world, and so order had to be shown triumphing over chaos and good over evil" (Pinch 2002: 17).Egypt has innumerable myths that were collected from tomb, statues, temple walls and most of the facts that appear in the retellings "have not changed"(Green 2011:Prologue) and have the form that existed even 30 centuries ago. Some of the Egyptian Gods are Ra, the Sun God that is considered one of the most important deities and then, river Nile which is worshipped as Khnemn. Goddess Isis is considered as part of the whole principle of life and reproduction (Green 2011: Prologue). Among the retellings, Donna Jo Napoli's Treasury of Egyptian Mythology focuses on the original tales that provides information about the Egyptian myths. The narrative has incorporated information about Egyptian Pharoah, the Sun God -Ra and other legendary

creatures like Sphinx but in fragments and so it might not ignite the imagination of a child but its edifying aspect doesn't seem challenging due to its charming illustrative technique. One of the retellings, *Pantheon* is based on the true story of the Egyptian gods with the focus on the battle between Set and Horus for the throne of Egypt. It is a graphic representation created by Hamish Steele. The reading can easily by stimulated by the graphic representation that appeals a young mind. It can not only inform but also excite a child to use his energies in a positive way. Another retelling, Collen Houck's *Reawakened* is also based on adventure of 17-year-old Lilliana Young who endeavors to find a live young Egyptian prince with Godlike powers. Her adventures in this quest serve a purposeful quest for a child who indirectly learns the moral of victory of good over evil.

Egypt, that has been translated from the ancient word, *Kemet* literally means black land. It has lot of such myths based on supernatural elements, which usually electrify a young mind. Our paper analyses Rick Riordan's purpose of using Egyptian mythology in his *Kate Chronicles Trilogy,* with special focus on his positive influence on the young minds.

Discussion

Leighton views that Riordan's adaptations of classical myths create "a conscious discourse and interrelationship between pre-text and re-version" (2014: 70). He further notes that the writer serves a "duality of purpose'' through his writings, which is both to activate "familiar archetype narratives (for those who are 'knowing')'' and to place the reworking of the myths "in contemporary cultural and social geography to deliver a message tailored for younger readers (who may yet be 'unknowing')'' (71). All of Riordan's texts are retellings of mythical hero's quest and adventures in the contemporary period. The same scholar explains the reason behind this temporal shift in Riordan's works also. He asserts that the contemporary setting brings "the narrative closer to the audience's frame of reference" (63).

Journeys of the mythical heroes and their adventures have been retold exhaustively across cultures. However, uniqueness of Riordan's adaptations lies in the fact that the objective of initiation of his retellings has been extremely personal. His son, Haley had hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia. Hence, he had to read aloud to his son. Since his son was fascinated with myths, he recounted stories to him from the Classical Literature. However, soon myths from the Classics got exhausted and he started to invent his own. On the persuasion of his son, he turned these oral narrations into his first book and Percy Jackson, the

protagonist from his first series, was born with the personal characteristics of his own son. Riordan was initially a school teacher, who devoted to full time writing once his books started to sell.

His first series was based in Greek mythology and became instant hit with children and adolescent readers. Corbett informs in Riordan's biographical account that even while "he was still writing Percy's story, kids began asking him to write a similar series based on Egyptian mythology" (2012:27). He himself felt that Ancient Egypt with its gods, magic, curses, hieroglyphics, pyramids, and pharaohs would fire the imagination of young children and he came out with his first book in the Kate Chronicles trilogy, *The Red Pyramid*. Another reason for using Egyptian mythology was that he felt, it wasn't as well -known as Greek or Roman and thus, his young readers should be exposed to it.

Egyptian mythology and Kane Chronicles Trilogy

Kane Chronicles Trilogy is the adventure of the siblings, Carter and Sadie, descendants of Ancient Egyptian Magicians, who fight the Egyptian gods unleashed in the modern world. The siblings have "the blood of the pharaohs" and thus, "they are descended from Egypt's royal lines, which gave them a natural capacity for magic and hosting the power of the gods" (Riordan, 2011: 66).

There are three books in the series; the first book is *The Red Pyramid,* the second is *The Throne of Fire* and the final book in the series is *The Serpent's Shadow.* The first book opens with the protagonist, Carter Kane, introducing himself as the son of a famous archaeologist (Egyptologist), whose work takes him all over the world, especially Egypt:

Mostly we go to Egypt, since that's his specialty. Go into a bookstore, find a book about Egypt, there's a pretty good chance it was written by Dr. Julius Kane. You want to know how Egyptians pulled the brains out of mummies, or built the pyramids, or cursed King Tut's tomb? My dad is your man (Riordan 2010: 1).

The plot of the three books revolves round the adaptations of the main Egyptian gods like Hera, the queen of the Egyptian gods; Apophis, the god of chaos and Ra, the Sun God. The three books explore faults and strengths of the Egyptian gods and leaders through the journey of the characters from the contemporary world. The first book informs us that in the Egyptian mythology, Apophis "hated Creation from the moment the first mountain appeared out of the sea. He hated the gods, mortals, and everything they built" (113). The declaration in the first book that "The battle is fought generation after generation" (113) asserts that

myths come alive in the context of our age and culture, giving us life lessons. Thus, the war with Apophisis is symbolic of the constant war with the negative energies, that takes new shapes and forms in each generation. Carter's father's admission to his children that he is both Osiris and Julius Kane, is again symbolic of the continuity of the past into the present. He says, "I am alive and dead… Osiris is the god of the dead, and the god of new life" (223).

If Apophis has been the representation of the negative, Ra, the Sun God is the epitome of positive. The second book in the series, *The Throne of Fire,* informs its readers about Ra in detail:

Ra was the first and most powerful king of the gods. We believe Ra is still alive. He's just asleep somewhere deep in the Duat (2011: 69).

Ra had three different personalities. He was Khepri the scarab god in the morning; Ra during the day; and Khnum, the ram headed god, at sunset, when he went into the underworld (23).

While rebuking Isis, Egyptian goddess of magic, Ra makes some most philosophical observations:

The balance between Ma'at and Chaos will slowly degrade. Egypt itself will fall. The names of her gods will fade to a distant memory. Then one day, the entire world will stand on the brink of destruction. You will cry out to Ra, and I will not be there. When that day comes, remember how your greed and ambition caused it to happen (237).

Representation of the brave, honorable, righteous magicians yet with ambitious and greedy streak, whose biggest desire is to rule the gods, teaches the young readers that good and bad are part of each human personality and each human being needs to be constantly waging war against evil within himself or herself. The third book, *The Serpent's Shadow*, ends with the siblings musing over the "hotspots of evil magic and demon activity all over the world" (2012: 299) which is suggestive of the destructive minds and their activities in the present world creating havoc, mayhem and destruction. However, there are always the positive energies to defeat the negative ones.

Thus, *Kane Chronicles Trilogy* lets his young audience sense and experience both negative and positive energies from the Egyptian civilizations and make their own wise choices. The young readers relate to the elements of the monomyth of the hero's quest in the series as it does not talk of the primitiveness but the continuity of the myth. Hence, his Trilogy educates Egyptian mythology in the most interesting and relatable way.

Conclusion

Childhood, in particular, is a stage which focuses on needs and so "Children's literature has from the very beginning been related to pedagogies" (Nickolajeva 2015:1) and as asserted, "teaching mythology opens for a student a gateway to realm of understanding" (Paint:1962). Thus, a child's curiosity can be satisfied by directing him into such learning that is not a direct instruction but has some hidden moral lesson.

Cassirer, the mythologist explains that one of the chief functions of myth is to, "arouse emotions and prompt man to certain actions" (1979 :37). *Kane Chronicles Trilogy* is filled with instances where myths are capable of performing this critical function. There can be a possibility that some children get attracted towards the darker sides or characters but it must be noted that these retellings that are based on Egyptian mythology have a theme of goodness being always rewarded and evil being punished. Children get themselves involved in this completely and create their world of fantasy. In fact, in this pursuit they also learn to build in relations with others, especially the ones that are with the protagonist and indirectly understand the values of strong relationships with friends and family.

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