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MYTH, MYTHOPOEIA AND HIGH FANTASY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN NOVELS

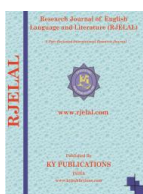
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ABSTRACT

Myths are important to highlight the origin of world to society. Indian mythology and its innumerable sections have permanent influence on Indian literature as a whole, which can be considered a literary genre itself. Mythology in the Indian context encloses all-inclusive subject, to which everybody wants to be a part of life.

Keywords – Myth, mythopoeia, Contemporary Indian novels

From the Greek *mythos*, myth means story or word. Mythology is the study of myth. As stories myths articulate how characters undergo or enact an ordered sequence of events. The term myth has come to refer to a certain genre of stories that share characteristics that make this genre distinctly different from other genres of oral narratives, such as legends and folktales. Many definitions of myth repeat similar general aspects of the genre and may be summarized thus: Myths are symbolic tales of the past and connected to beliefs or rituals, and serve direct social action and values.

The classic definition of myth from folklore studies finds clearest delineation in William Bascom's article:

"The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives" where myths are defined as tales believed as true, usually sacred, set in the distant past or other worlds or parts of the world, and with extra-human, inhuman, or heroic characters (1)

Mythology in Indian context is the most utilised and admired genre. History proves that every generation have expressed their desire to enrich knowledge in myths, mythology and legends. Indian

mythology is like Chinese whispers. A story, told and retold over generations, develops its own sub-plots, introduces new characters and relatable events and changes perspectives according to the storyteller.

"Myth, history, and the contemporary – all become part of the same chronological sequence; one is not distinguished from another; the passage from one to another, consequently, is entirely unproblematic". -Partha Chatterjee ((2)

Myths are important to highlight the origin of world to society. Indian mythology and its innumerable sections have permanent influence on Indian literature as a whole, which can be considered a literary genre itself. Mythology in the Indian context encloses all-inclusive subject, to which everybody wants to be a part of. Mythological themes in Indian literature first bear its most influential and destiny-defying traces in the two epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These colossal epics and its innumerable plots, sub-plots make these epics, mythological series in ancient Indian literature. Indian literature is saturated with several types of mythological characters and their portrayal has relevance with the contemporary Indian society.

Whenever a new literary term is coined, it's a chance to observe not only the innovative authors but the readers as well.

"Mythopoeia has taken off in the Indian Diaspora because there has been a change in readership from a mature audience to a younger one. This lot has a desperate yearning to reconnect. They want to consume mythology but in a well packaged and easily digestible way." — Ashwin Sanghi, author of *The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*

Mythopoeia genre is the stuff of legend. Mythopoeia is Greek for mythos-making. As the name suggests, it's a narrative genre where a fictional mythology is created by the author. Lord of the Rings author JRR Tolkien first used the term as the title of one of his poems in order to explain and defend creative myth-making. Mythopoeia is getting a fresh lease of life with popular book *The Shiva Trilogy* books by Amish Tripathi; *The Krishna Key* by Ashwin Sanghi, Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of The Vanquished*. Indian authors aren't far behind. These writers are mining our nation's ancient epics to write thrillers and fantasy series.

Amish Tripathi argue that the very term mythology, which comes from the Greek word mythos, means to hide the truth and that it is up to us to discover it through the story. According to Amish Tripathi, the only ancient civilisation that has kept its myths alive even today is India. This is not because the other myths aren't as rich as ours but because we have understood the philosophy behind them. Myths are not about the stories but about the message you spread through them. And as societies and beliefs change, myths have to change along with them. Modernising and localising myths are ways of keeping them relevant in modern times. Otherwise, they would die out. Whether that would make them relatable is something readers will have to decide.

High fantasy is a subgenre of fantasy fiction, defined either by its setting in an imaginary world or by the epic stature of its characters, themes and plot. The term high fantasy was coined by Lloyd Alexander in a 1971 essay, *High Fantasy and Heroic Romance*. High fantasy is defined as fantasy fiction

set in an alternative, fictional ("secondary") world, rather than the real, or "primary" world. The secondary world is usually internally consistent, but its rules differ from those of the primary world. By contrast, low fantasy is characterized by being set in the primary or real world, or a rational and familiar.

Indian mythological stories carry a new or different perspective. Especially of note are the novels based on the two epics *Mahabharatha* and *Ramayana* and there have been a spate of novels containing stories through the eyes of different characters. New existence of different re-telling will add to the already rich colours to mythic folktales. Imagination in this genre with respect to plot development and story-telling since the basic skeleton is already there on which the authors put the skin of their works. for e.g., Chitra Banerjee's *Palace of Illusions*, Ashok Banker's *Ramayan -A Retelling*, *The Shiva Trilogy* books by Amish Tripathi; *The Krishna Key* by Ashwin Sanghi, Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of The Vanquished*.

Contemporary Indian Novel reclaims Indian history by using Indian myths, narrative strategies and tradition in its portrayal, and foregrounds India by showcasing her literary heritage, philosophy, myths, tradition and culture to an international English-speaking audience and poses a challenge to the realist and traditional historiographic means of representing Indian history. Contemporary Indian Novel is a work of fiction and therefore not bound by the conventions of academic historiography. It contains same facts as historiography but presents and interprets them through alternative narrative characters.

Contemporary Indian Novel's historical discourse is variegated with Indian elements, mythopoeia and high fantasy is used to challenge both the transition-narrative of modernity and traditional history-writing.

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