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SIGNIFICANCE OF MYTHOLOGY IN INDIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Myths are traditional narratives developed by civilizations to explain events. Originally, myths were religious stories that provided rational arguments for explaining natural or supernatural happenings to members of a society. The interpretation of myth in literature is immensely important. It could be read as a theory, an allegory, or a symbol. A myth is a conventional or mythological story about an event or a figure that may or may not include accurate or logical reasoning. They identify those rites, activities, and natural occurrences, as well as demigods and deities in general. A theory is frequently based on supernatural beings and historical occurrences. However, the primary goal of writing is to educate and persuade people. Mythology provides other advantages. Other advantages of mythology that are not achievable in fiction are the absence of boundaries between worlds, the absence of "truth," and the little probability of anyone questioning the theory. Mythology in Indian literature plays a pivotal role by serving as a rich tapestry that weaves cultural, moral, and spiritual threads into the narrative fabric. These ancient myths, drawn from diverse epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, not only entertain but also impart profound wisdom, ethical lessons, and a sense of cultural identity. Indian literature uses mythology to explore timeless themes, reflect societal values, and provide a deep understanding of the human condition, creating a literary landscape deeply rooted in tradition and universal truths. The present paper attempts to show the significance of mythology in Indian literature.

Keywords

Myths, Religious stories, Theory, Occurrences, Natural, Mythology, Literature, Fiction.

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Myths are creatively and symbolically depicted tales that uphold the universe's reality. It is impossible to put these dramatic sagas into words. Mythology has influenced customs, traditions, and historical faiths. Unquestionably, an essential component of Indian civilization is its mythology. Tale chronicles and myths were combined with mythology to shape the view of the general public. The rich tradition of myth and legend-based literature has also been retained in the West. Greek myths and biblical stories can be found in all genres of English literature, which adds to the importance of illustrated works. This continued till the dawn of a new era.

Legends and myths have their origins, especially in India. Since Indian mythology has evolved into a supporting backdrop, Indian writers have appropriated and expanded upon myth in all genres of writing. Tales and ideas from the Vedas, Upanishad, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and associated Buddhist scriptures are incorporated into Indian English literature. Many narratives, such as the Puranas, Epics, and Vedic texts, aim to reveal the truths about Hindu civilization. Indian mythology makes Indian culture unique globally and enriches it. Indian mythology is used to pass down word-of-mouth stories from one generation to the next. Every piece of regional Indian literature makes the theory clear.

Myths are significant because they shed light on a society's beginnings or specific worldview, as well as because they have literary and life-related connections. These questions are reflected in myths in modern Indian literature as viewed by researchers such as Alok Bhalla, Vishwanath Khaire, R Shashidhar, and others. These queries demonstrate the myth's epistemic ability to reveal a multitude of facts. Interestingly, these facts lend themselves to multiple interpretations, even of sacred texts such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Myths can be defined as traditional tales about the natural world, ancestors, heroes, and heroines, or as supernatural creatures that represent archetypal figures in an early human

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worldview. Myths evoke a people's awareness by expressing profound and widely shared emotions or by reflecting its cultural ideals. These stories describe the origins of humanity and their perception of the outer world. They also describe the characteristics, attributes, and intentions of the gods of old and tell stories about individuals, events, or organizations. The methodical study and collection of myths is known as mythology. Investigating mythologies found in the earliest recorded records of antiquity is essential to understanding the ideologies and beliefs of ancient peoples. Studying mythology also increases our appreciation of both modern and classical literature and art.

A myth is an oral story spoken about heroes and gods. Mythology is the study of these myths and their sets, which occasionally pertain to certain religious or cultural traditions, such as a collection of tales or opinions about a single person or event, which are often fictional or exaggerated.

It makes sense that myths developed in prehistoric cultures when people encountered the majesty of natural wonders like the sun, sky, mountains, and sea, as well as impersonal, incomprehensible, occasionally awesome, and possibly violent natural phenomena. Humans felt small and inferior in the face of these marvels. Thus, they gave remarkable human qualities of individuality and potency to those things that most deeply stirred human emotions. Early humans were driven to create gods who ruled the heavenly realm by the wonders of birth, the end of the world, the fear of death, and the origin of the world. Over time, it was thought that a governing deity oversaw all facets of human nature, the natural world, and human existence.

The legends of these gods, goddesses, cultural heroes, and heroines have served, and still serve, a variety of functions. At first, cosmogony stories shed light on the beginnings of humankind. There is a creation myth in almost every society. A culture's origins, customs, traditions, and beliefs are explained by myths, which also serve to uphold cultural norms and values and provide a picture of what that society considers to be good or evil. Myths help define how humans relate to a deity or deities.

As civilization progressed, the legends of warriors who fought for the tribe and defeated their opponents, as well as sages who supported the tribe's cause through innovation or legislation, bolstered the sequence of tales of good and evil spirits. These stories developed in number and scope throughout time, eventually becoming mythical. Some of the gods and goddesses who are worshipped by humans were once ordinary people who lived on this small planet.

Mythology has always piqued the attention and fascination of writers. Myths have infiltrated every genre, from epics to poetry to novels, transcending age, society, and language. Indian literature is no exception since it satisfies Indians' deep yearning to be enriched by tales, mythology, legends, and folklore. Mythology, with its fascinating twists and the ultimate victory of goodness over evil, as well as its emancipated kingdoms, has been a constant source of inspiration for Indian writers since time immemorial. Despite its antiquity, Indian mythology continues to have an indelible impact on Indian writer's choices of subjects, themes, and narratives.

Myth, while formerly considered literature, now has far-reaching consequences in modern times. It is always being supplanted by history as true things that happened. Even so, myths continue to define and shape literature in significant ways. A myth, as an intrinsic aspect of literature, can be recounted, built on, or discovered with new patterns. It is still a significant literary genre in all civilizations. Myths had a natural literary structure.

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Mythology has always been associated with India and Indians. Because Indian mythology is widely accepted, it has been the source of a diverse range of subjects, ideas, and stories in storytelling. Regardless of whether it belongs to the modern era or the past, Indian mythology has had a lasting impact on Indian literature as a whole. In one way or another, Indian literature in English attempts to textualize live myths by establishing various literary traditions. It helps us to study its interiors and deep-seated existence to understand the connections between myths, archetypes, and the formation of new sensitivities.

Myths have been used as an important weapon in exposing certain important disputes in contemporary India. Issues of today find parallels in myths and fables of the past, providing new meanings and insights and reinforcing the theme. To put it another way, myth is transformed and finds a method to be expressed through diverse mediums to disclose current world problems. Authors have discovered a new way to express and discuss issues such as casteism, poverty, men-women relationships, economic inequalities, social injustice, sublime and ecstatic extinction of cultural rituals, the problematics of non-secularism, scientific horrors, politics, diseases, communal riots, various movements, extinction of cultural heritage, freedom movement, and so on through myths.

When the social ethos is re-evaluated using procedures such as de-canonization or rereading, a new meaning emerges through interpretations. By acquiring fresh voices, mythical personalities are supplemented and complimented. Myth narratives encapsulate reality, tying up contemporary societal problems, presenting contemporary history in a new light, and breaking the old.

Myths in their original form are rarely accepted. To become acceptable, they are always interpreted and reinterpreted, codified, and updated. They have always been effective tools for managing society and have contributed to the naturalization of social orders. They are equally effective when used by radical elements. The metaphors and storylines are rich in reflections on Indian society's social structure and class supremacy throughout the years. The Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads, with their countless stories and characters, have remained the source of countless literary works. Their ability to disclose social problems and cultural concerns is critical to India's cultural hegemony. The authors employ myth to find fresh ways to re-motivate history. The kaleidoscope spectrum of these viewpoints provides new voices to voiceless, marginalized, and disregarded communities.

Mythology is a collection of mythological stories, particularly those associated with a specific religious or cultural heritage. In the dictionary of literary terms, the word "mythology" is used to describe "a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives"(Abrams & Harpham 230). However, myth serves as the cornerstone of many societies and cultures. It reflects a society's traditions, beliefs, practices, and so on. Myth, according to Devdutt Pattanaik, is "a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together...if the myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea" (Pattanaik xvi). Myth and mythology are important in community formation.

It has been a source of inspiration for artists and authors all across the world, and myth has now emerged as a prominent genre in both literary fiction and non-fiction literature. Such mythical stories are prevalent in Hindu religious literature in India, particularly in the two great epics, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. These two great epics are regarded not just

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as religious works, but also as societal treatises. It continues to have a significant impact on Indian life and culture. These two epics are usually regarded as the most adapted masterpieces in literature.

Professor Susan Visvanathan of Jawaharlal Nehru University says mythology never dies, it just resurfaces with new interests. Before the invention of the printing press, legendary stories were passed down orally from generation to generation. These stories are now being told through many mediums such as printed texts, movies, television series, cartoons, computer games, music, and so on. These enable old stories to travel faster and reach a greater number of people than ever before. However, the various topics in mythical stories have captivated readers and authors for years. One of the prevalent themes in contemporary writing in India is rewriting mythology in a new contemporary way. In the modern era, historical legends are taking on new forms and mingling with modern literature. Modern writers have approached such stories differently; they have re-interpreted those ancient mythical stories from entirely new angles, challenging the original story's rigidity.

Dr. Pradnyashailee Bhagwan Sawai, in *The Context*, writes "Pure myth can be retold in any language, any style, and in any medium without losing its identity...it is his understanding that reinterpretation of the tales is how the writers tell us what they exactly feel about that particular story or narrative" (qtd. in Kulkarni 714). Thus, while the style and methodology have changed to suit the times, contemporary writers have narrated historical tales without sacrificing the essence of the original works. They have begun to play around with structure and storytelling. The stories are retold so that the characters become less heavenly and more human. New retellings have sparked a lot of interest and are quite popular among today's Indian readers. S. R. Sinha stated that these books on Indian mythology and stories have "set the book market on fire" (Sinha 130). D.W. Mohamed and Donia Gamila also write:

Borrowing a certain tale or character from ancient mythologies, and then molding them into a new narrative that appeals to modern-day audiences, does not only heighten the popularity of mythology but also contributes to popularizing certain works of literature. (Mohamed & Gamila)

Writers such as Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Kavita Kane have become well-known for their works based on Indian myths. Reena Singh says in her article "Best-Selling Myths" that mythological fiction is one of the new significant money-spinners in the book publishing industry in India and around the world. Through blending the mythical genre with other writing styles, authors have been experimenting with it. According to S. Kulkarni, writers have taken Indian epics as "their base stories in Indian fantasy fiction" and have given it "prime importance completely abstaining from popular fantasies of the west, like 'Harry Potter' or 'The Lord of the Rings'" (Kulkarni 714). They have modernized the Indian story and given it a new perspective, capturing the interest of modern minds. Thus, these writers have made significant contributions to popularizing and revitalizing Indian culture and history among young Indian readers who had practically forgotten their rich heritage of mythology and culture in favor of the Western one. According to S. R. Sinha,

The young Indian of today is generally not very aware of her rich heritage of mythology. She has a very vague, often hazy idea of her mythology. On the other hand, western myths and legends abound in the short stories, poems, and novels that children read while growing up. So young readers of today may be familiar with stories of Robin Hood, King Arthur and his Roundtable, vampires, Greek legends, or witches and

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wizards, but may not be fully aware of stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana. (Sinha 132)

As a result, when new mythological literature, particularly fiction, began to enter the literary market, average Indian readers realized their lack of understanding of their myths and culture, and therefore these novels garnered widespread appeal. In India, mythological fiction has now dominated the area of contemporary fiction. Furthermore, there is a resurgence of mythology in children's literature. Many writers have produced mythological stories for children to provide youngsters with a deep knowledge of mythology in a way that makes reading pleasurable and fun for them.

Various stories of Indian folklore have been passed down through generations by word of mouth or meticulously kept accounts of the same. These myths, which form the core of Indian folklore, are an excellent way for indigenous and non-native people to instill a love of Indian culture in the next generation. The following are some important aspects of Indian mythology.

Indian mythology is narrated through Hindu classics including the Vedic literature, the epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the Puranas, and regional writings like the Periyapuram. Hindu mythology can be found in Southeast Asian classics as well as popular literature like the Panchatantra and Hitopadesha Tales. Hindu philosophy is also devoid of a cohesive, monolithic form. The same idea appears in many different forms and has multiple interpretations in social and religious contexts. Over time, these myths have also been revised by numerous intellectual systems, especially in the Hindu tradition. Many interpretations and expansions sometimes symbolically have been added to these stories.

The Vedas have been verbally transmitted from the second millennium BCE using sophisticated mnemonic processes. Mantras, rather than semantics, are repeated as the earliest component of the Vedas in the present age, and they are known to be "primordial rhythms of creation," preceding the forms to which they allude.

The Samhitas (mantra and blessings), Aranyaka (texts on rites, ceremonies such as the newborn infant's passage rite, age arriving, weddings, death and cremation, sacrifices, and symbolic sacrifices), Brahmanas (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifice), and Upanishads (text on reflection, philosopher's commentaries) are the four main text categories. According to the Grihya-sutras, the ceremonies, procedures, and practices detailed in these ancient writings largely reconstructed Indo-Euro marital rites in an area of the Indian, Persian, and European subcontinent.

Ramayana (Sanskrit for "Rama's Passion" or "Rama's Career") is a 24,000-line epic poem. This book is divided into seven parts and tells the story of Rama, or Ramachandra, the King of Ayodhya, and the God of Reality. The poet Valmiki is attributed with the job, but it was written by numerous writers and adorned by others over the years.

The Ramayana is an important part of faith and literature not only in India but also in other South Asian and Southeast Asian countries. It was originally written in Sanskrit and has been translated into numerous other languages. There are distinctions as well. The stories may be based on Rama, a ruler who promoted Hindu and Aryan beliefs throughout India. Hindu nationalists allege that their 1980s assault on the Ayodhya mosque was based on this belief because it was built on Rama's birthplace. It is thought that simply reading or experiencing the Ramayana provides benefits. The common belief is, "He who has no children can get a son by reading Rama's song except in a single line." Citizens who learn or hear it discover that shame has been washed away. Those who pray the Ramayana should have a lot of money and gold.

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The Guinness World Book of Records states that the Mahabharata, which means "Big Bharata War" in Sanskrit, is the longest fictitious work in history. It was composed primarily in the early Christian era when Hinduism gained widespread acceptance. It is organized into eighteen volumes and has 100,000 pairs. It is eight times longer than the Iliad and Odyssey taken together, and fifteen times longer than the Bible.

There is a claim that the Mahabharata is the source of all world events and that nothing that is not recorded in the epic can happen somewhere else. The consequences of these events are significantly less obvious in terms of norms than they are in the Ramayana. Great conflicts and heroes abound, but triumphs also bring out melancholy rather than joy.

The Mahabharata bears a striking resemblance to the Iliad, as the majority of the action and plot revolve around fighting and battle. The epic war described in the Mahabharata may be based on a real battle that took place in the 13th or 14th century B.C. The Sanskrit poetry was composed at first. The translation loses much of the poem's charm and its original tone.

One could refer to the Mahabharata as India's national epic. The world's greatest epic poem, with almost 100,000 double lines, is this one. The Sanskrit Mahabharata is an unknown collaborative work, just like previous great epics. Most people believe that the poem recounts events that happened in Northern India in the ninth century B.C., during a period of territorial unrest. Although the epic borrows some of its final form from the ancient sacred Vedic scriptures, it was performed by "street bards" or "troubadours" over centuries.

In conclusion, mythology has a long and illustrious history with literature. Poetry and nonfictional works from India are either directly or indirectly influenced by these elements. The plays and literature from India are mostly based on theory as if a lot of the writer's problems could be solved by theory. They use myth as inspiration while trying to convey a message or an idea that is relevant to everyone. Myths and legends appear to give these Indian writer's works a new perspective and connect them to the historical period of the Indian people's beliefs and customs.

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