

HASHTAG, NOW TRENDING: MYTHS AND MYTHOLOGIES

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Abstract:

Indo-Anglian fiction in the 21st century has witnessed a renaissance. Where the writers of postcolonial era struggled to find audience, Indians have now taken the English language from the imperialists and have made it their own. With the advent of postmodernism in India, writers have turned their attention towards Indian mythology, a traditional store house for all cultural, theatrical and literary inspiration. It is the new voice of Indian writing in English, its affinity towards myth and the creative usage of the same. The present paper seeks to trace the tendencies which triggered Indian writers to probe into the realm of mythologies in the last two decades.

Keywords: Indian writing, mythology, postmodernism, popular culture, travel, LGBTQ.

Introduction:

Indian English Literature has stamped its greatness globally by giving its language cultural nuances and 'Indianness'. If we look back at the literary canon of Indian English Literature, it will be fair to say that the canon is rich, brimming with myriad subjects and multiple voices. Indian writing has juxtaposed tradition and modernity in the production of art and literature that created an ever-shining mark in the minds and hearts of the arts lovers. Indian writers have concentrated from the time of its inception; on an entirely new-fangled set of themes which are as wide-ranging and complex as the life in the age of globalisation is. But why did the writers of Indian English turn their attention towards mythology in the past two decades? There is no doubt about how deeply rooted Indian culture is in its mythology. Mythologies are such an integrated part of any culture. It gives a group of people or communities a collective meaning and shared history that helps creating an identity and shared rituals. Traditionally, mythology talks about the beginning and the end of the world. These myths are somebody's truth and one ought to respect that.

Mythology makes up a dominant and a large part of cultural heritage, a reminder and anchor to one's roots. It serves as a foundational base for nearly all religious practices and customs, that are an integral

part of any society. In the Indian context, mythology serves as a store-house for ideas, creativity, creation, art, literature, music, dance and theatre. In literature specially, translations and transliterations have been trending for the love for story-telling or hearing a good story.

Plurality in India:

Indian culture is highly plural in nature. If multiculturalism was a person, India would have been its native place. The sheer diversity at micro and macro levels, stately and religiously, rurally and urbanely is overwhelming. Even in languages, India is multilingual. The plethora of languages and their spoken dialects and the added amalgamation of these makes this country a boiling cauldron of languages and cultures. This diversity is witnessed in food, clothing, fashions, architecture, daily practices and philosophies. Every day new cultures are created when migration, marriage and other professional jobs clash and mingle, giving rise to formidable plurality.

This profusion is in stark contrast with the monolithic sort of culture practiced in the West. The 18th and 19th century Europe was divided between the worshippers of faith and believers of science. They both had faith in their respective dogmas and absolutism. Even with branches within their religion; it was one religion. The European mindset was not adept to understand the Indian thought, a lack of common belief and its plurality and diversity. Various Indologists of the west have translated Indian texts to help them understand the Indian thought.

The first Sanskrit text to be translated into English was 'The Manusmriti' in 1974, by Sir William Jones. The book was used to formulate the Hindu Law by the British Colonial Government. The Vedas, specially Rigveda was translated by Ralph T.H. Griffith, the British Indologist in the late 18th century. The Upanishads were translated by Max Muller, who was also a British Indologist.

A Run for Validation:

In retrospect, garnished with education, the people of Indian subcontinent saw how their thought was perceived by the English. It made them question their own metanarratives and

superstitions dogmas. Another reason for this could be 'the run for validation'. Off-lately, there has been a certain trend to logically and scientifically explain the principles of faith. Scientific reasoning behind a certain ritual, forms of prayers, customs and their historical accuracy. Each community has taken upon itself to validate their history, even things which were considered myth are accepted as history because of the unquestionable belief in the same. This leads to a renewed interest in visiting places mentioned in the epics, giving rise to myth-tourism.

Postmodernism in India:

The winds of postmodern thought, which influence all areas of western culture, saw its sprouting in India during the 1980s. An absolute, radical rejection of metanarratives was not possible at all once, but the thought had influenced the literature and philosophies of the generation. No sooner, we find that Indian writing has taken a new turn. Voicing the protests of all those marginalised, and so-called weaker sections of our society. The women writings also took a new-turn and powerful voices were heard across the nation. Today, we can witness rejection of norms and rituals that the generation believes to be political, derogatory, patriarchal and outdated. This can not be applicable in a general sense, but the change is visible. Postmodernism operates in India along with traditionalism and modernism, all at once. In literature Indian writing has shown the elements of postmodernism in works like, Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children', Allan Sailey's 'Trotter Nama: A Chronicle', Arvind Adiga's 'The White Tiger', Shashi Tharoor's 'The Great Indian Novel', Ashok Banker's 'The Pocket Essential Bollywood', and Preeti Shinoy's 'Life is What you Make it' are some memorable examples.

Engagement with the Epics:

Indian culture has always been attached to its mythology and many aspects of life are governed by it. For artists and creators, it has acted like a storehouse of inspiration. From music forms, folk dance, classical dance forms, theatre to cartoons, films, serials and lifestyle; mythology has been an ever-present entity. Indian television is filled with various versions of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Animated movies on them are also produced to instill culture and establish a national identity among the younger generation. In music, the role of mythology surpasses any expectations. Whether mainstream or regional, 'bhajans', 'abhangas', songs, poetries of saints and gurus, chants of various hymns and 'mantras' have been an integral practice. Technology has obviously played an

important role in this, but even before that, gatherings called as 'satsangs' were performed, and they do so even today.

Indian fashion and lifestyle industry are also influenced by mythology. From tattoos and body art, prints on apparel, show-pieces, abstract paintings, decoration have scenes and art forms derived from mythology. Even in literature, mythology has been used in works like 'Amar Chitra Katha', regional translations of myth, like the 'Ramcharitmanas' by Tulsi Das, and 'Adhyatmaramayanam Killipattu' by Ramanujan Ezhuthachan in Malayalam. Therefore, it is bound to reflect even in Indo-Anglian literature as Devdutt Pattanaik explains in his introduction to his book 'Myth= Mithya' states:

Everybody lives in a myth. This idea disturbs most people. For conventionally myth means falsehood nobody likes to live in falsehood. Everybody believes they live in truth. But there are many types of truth. Some objective, some subjective, some intuitive, some universal. Some are based on evidence, others depend upon faith. Myth is truth which is subjective, intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith. Likewise, culture has a profound influence on myth and mythology. People outgrow myth and mythology when myth and mythology fail to respond to their cultural need. What is right, sacred and beautiful to one group of people need not be right sacred and beautiful to another group of people.

Every opinion and every decision depend upon the prevailing truth. Even perfection is a myth. There is no evidence of a perfect world, a perfect man or a perfect family anywhere on earth. Perfection exists only in mythology yet everyone craves for it. This craving inspires art, establishes empires, speaks revolutions and motivates leaders. Such is the power of myth. (Pattanaik, xv)

The Influence of Harry Potter:

A new-found interest in mythology can be credited to the massive and coming success of the Harry Potter franchise in India. J.K. Rowling's saga is deeply rooted in different mythological paradigms. It consists of amalgamation of the Greek, Norse, Japanese and Roman myths along with Christian allegories, Eastern myths and lastly Shakespeare. This ignited people's interest in mythology and so started the process of tracing cultural myths and creating fiction. Rowling 'literally' changed the whole landscape of writing and diverted a new-found love towards mythology. There were parallels drawn between Harry Potter and Indian mythology; Harry and Lord Krishna's prophecy, Kansa and Voldemort, Harry being the chosen one, and the approaches are endless. Dr. Benazir states,

Remus Lupin, Minerva McGonagall, Filius Flitwick, Horace Slughorn and all can be contrasted with Dronacharya, Krupacharya, Ashwatthama, Vasishtha,

Vishwamitra, Shukracharya, Gargi, Maitreyi who are all supreme prodigies. Enchantment is educated in Hogwarts though the Vedic culture was instructed in the Gurukulam. Some of the parallels are Herbology-Ayurveda; Astronomy-Astronomy; Divination-Astrology; Flying-horse riding; Potions incorporated into Ayurveda; Defence Against the Dark Arts – Archery, sword battling; Care of mysterious animals – restraining wild stallions and elephants; Arithmancy – Mathematics; Transfiguration-change mantras. Dim expressions (however never showed formally) can be contrasted with Atharva Veda ("Veda of otherworldly recipes") magic or religious rituals to address superstitious nervousness, spells to evacuate illnesses accepted to be created by devils, and herbs-and nature-determined elixirs as medication. In Harry Potter the amusement Quidditch has been played by the understudies of Hogwarts correspondingly in old days horse polo played by all understudies in the Gurukulam. Harry Potter story comprises of Giants and half mammoths like Hagrid, in Ramayana, Ravana's sibling is Kumbhakarna who used to rest for six months a genuine goliath. (Benazir, 2017)

It created a snow-ball effect as writers took to the popular demand and took a plunge deep into the realm of mythology.

Sub-genres of Indian Mythology in Indo-Anglian Writing:

The reason exemplified above echo the fact that Indian writers have probed into numerous Indian Tales which has given momentum to various sub-genres of story-telling. One such area is that of mythography. Retelling myths from various perspectives has been trending and writers like Devdutt Pattanaik, Kavita Kane, Pratibha Ray and Anand Neelkantan have published works that change the center of the traditional narration. Works like 'Sita' by Devdutt Pattanaik, 'Lanka's

Princess' by Kane, 'Draupadi' by Ray, 'Roll of Dice' by Neelkantan, exemplify this thought. Amish Tripathi's 'Shiva Trilogy' can be an example of fantasy. 'The Curse of Gandhari' by Aditi Banerjee, 'The Aryavarta Chronicles' by Krishna Udayshankar, 'The Krishna Key' by Ashwin Sanghi, 'The Palace of Illusions' and 'The Forest Enchantress' by Shashi Tharoor are some prime Indo-Anglian masterpiece in myth genre. Other sub-genres of mythology are 'Myth and Feminism', 'Mythic Fiction', 'Mythological Fantasy', 'Myth and LGBTQ', and 'Myth and Popular Culture'.

Conclusion:

The Indo-Anglian fiction has created its own flavour in mythology. The output of these creative impulses is overwhelming and has also given researchers a whole new area to explore. These works are embedded into Indian roots but demand a new perception and equal voice. It is, at once, a voice of protest, a product of creative liberty, pluralism and an attempt to connect young readers to the rich mythology, in this technologically driven and digitally forward 21st century.

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