

# Resonant Narratives: The Intersection of Mythology and Modernity in Indian English Fiction

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**Abstract:** The Indian English fictions are found to be interwoven with mythology and modernity and this review focuses on how the contemporary authors resort to traditional narratives to reflect and criticize the society as modern. Through intricate myths in their stories, writers of indelible cultural identities, such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, deter globalization and urbanization's ever accelerating metamorphoses. The analysis reveals that these authors utilize myth as a narrative frame to make their stories both interesting to Indian and international audiences, while dealing with contemporary concerns. Moreover, myth and modernity intersect to allow for the reconfiguration of national identity that challenges readers to reconsider the values which correlate with the modern as a response to modern challenges. But maneuvering the slippery line between ancient myths and modern times can be hard to master, and if you are rooted to a specific culture, you've got to be extra careful so that you aren't culturally insensitive. The review also indicates that future research can investigate lesser known authors and texts which constitute this discourse to further extend the definition of the genre. In the end, the constant dialogue between the mythology and modernity reveals not only the tangled society of India at the same time reminding the ever current qualities of these narratives as an influence on the present literature. This study adds to the wider discussion of postcolonial literature by providing an insight into how mythology is still used to create and inspire new interpretations in contemporary literature.

**Keywords:** Indian English Fiction, Mythology and Modernity, Traditional Narratives, Cultural Identity, Contemporary Authors

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

Indian English fiction, indeed, has come up as a significant writer of global literature allowing readers to view through a unique prism the many attributes of India's cultural and social heritage. Beginning as a medium of expression of a postcolonial era, it has subsequently become a strong and lively field. Distinctive for the blend it brings about of mythological motifs, modern themes, Indian readers as well as a global audience get to relate with these kinds of stories. Three most famous authors who have incorporated mythological stories in their texts are Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh, who exploit mythological stories to delve into the flaws of Indian psyche and to reply to universal human concerns.

Mythology occupies the highest pedestal in Indian culture; it serves as a store house of value systems, moral standards, identity of the culture. Embedded in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and in countless folk traditions, the foundational stories of Indian civilization are archetypes that explore basic human experiences. In these texts we explore the theme of heroism, sacrifice, love, and the ancient struggle between good and evil. It is found that these mythological frameworks are incorporated in Indian English fiction to engender a collective memory in readers 'the modern,' this intersection has greater relevance. Mythology provides the authors with elements which they can use to frame their narratives around and to address today's burning issues in relation to India's past, steeped in Indian literary heritage.

Consequently, Indian English fiction has been blessed with several widely prestigious awards, and received wide recognition, which has greatly increased its global impact on the world. It raises the visibility of Indian authors, while simultaneously affirming relevance of mythology to understanding modernity. *Midnight's Children* by Salman (1981) is a perfect example of this phenomenon: a book whose narrative faithfully describes India's agitated historical process from colonialism to India's independence. With a strong mythic authorial impulse, Rushdie uses mythic storytelling techniques to enable the audience to appreciate the resilience and interpret the complexity of the Indian cultural fabric and thus to understand something of the national identity and historical evolution.

Saleem Sinai is the empty protagonist of *Midnight's Children*, representing the omnipresence of personal and national histories on each other, and therefore, the socio-political backdrop of individual identities. The novel's magical realism mixes the two, creating blur between fiction and fact, allowing Rushdie to use mythical images that encompass the upheaval that is Indian history. Doing all this, he writes a compelling story which echoes with both Indian and the international audience to encapsulate the issues of identity, memory and historical trauma, (Rushdie, 1981; Trivedi et al., 2016).

*The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh integrates mythological aspect in the discussion of its own contemporary issue. Themes of environmentalism and displacement are explored through the Sundarbans, a special ecosystem to which the novel is connected, which itself is caught up in myth and legend. Ghosh uses myth to both enrich the narrative and to give a more nuanced story about the effects of climate change in marginalized communities. Ghosh places his characters in the context of

the ancient narratives and local folklore helps the reader understand the socio-environmental challenge facing the society in the present and describes the relevance of myths to deflect the modern (Rao et al., 2000).

In addition, Indian English fiction blending with mythology and modern themes poses a question to readers regarding how a cultural legacy transforms a contemporary reality. In an era of globalization that frequently strives to wipe away those traces, these narratives are a reminder that local stories and traditions are important. Mythology is used by authors as a way to express the intricacies of contemporary life and to confirm cultural authenticity. With this layered approach, not only do we cater to readers searching for true representation of cultures, but also to readers interested in the issues of the day.

Finally, Indian English fiction stands tall in world literature, articulating the crux of India's elaborate cultural and social heritage through a language acceptable to the world over. Such authors as Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh synthesize mythology and modernity so as to compose dynamic narrative framework which confronts universal themes and burning current problems. Such uses of mythological substances bring depth and cultural significance to these narratives, helping to enlarge a conversation about identity, history, and belonging in a world that is shifting quickly.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Review

This review aims to look at how Indian English writers use mythology to interpret and comment on the modern social, political and existential issues. Mythology is not merely nostalgic in its return to the cultural heritage of India; instead, it is a living and adaptable framework, in which authors can confront issues of the present. The connection of both mythology and modernity sets off questions connected with identity, cultural survival, and moral doubtfulness, making Indian English fiction a reasonable way to analyze the greater political scene (Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1798).

For example, with mythology's narrative structure, authors can delve into the intricacies of human nature and society, that's been relevant to Indian and worldwide readers. Myths are universally understood symbols and archetypes—heroes, villains, quests, trials—and give us layers of meaning to tell any story. By placing these symbols next to modern elements, they take on new meanings of India's own conflicting struggle between traditional and present (Patil, 2020). Through their manipulation of these mythological frameworks, for authors such as Roy, Ghosh, and Rushdie, among others, fit these characters, story arcs, into a world that they skilfully shape to comment on the issues of the modern day.

Duguid goes on to take this trope even further by stating that the intersection of this mythology also challenges us to consider mythology as a way of working through modern concerns. Mythological narratives give readers a space in which cultural continuity and innovation are concomitant. Myths are therefore also both a means of resistance to cultural homogenisation and a route for a dialogue with the universal human condition in the Indian English novel. Through unpacking how writers achieve this, the review will help to understand mythology as something more than a vestige of India's past, but as a form that is enduring and adaptable to, even anticipatory of, the demands of a modern readership (Patil, 2020).

## 1.3 Scope and Structure of the Article

The organization of this article is such that it gives a comprehensive account of the major works which show the integration of mythology and modernity in Indian English fiction. Firstly, it will deal with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which artfully intertwines myth, history and personal story to communicate India's postcolonial identity. Rushdie's use of magic realism and historical allegory in a myth inspired lens is unique, and allows him to critique sociopolitical conditions. In his protagonist Saleem Sinai, he turns him into a metaphorical man representing the nation, whose personal as well as historical crises reflect the problems of a modernising India (Mishra, 2007).

While the politics of caste, gender and family are examined in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which is more subtly embedded with myth, traditional archetypes and cultural allusions are used. Roy's narrative is very steeped in local traditions and folklore and explores questions of social stratification and injustice and is illustrative of how mythological frameworks can layer over very deeply rooted social norms. In particular, the novel's engagement with local myth and ritual as well as critique of modernity's explosive shock waves are an intimate yet critical portrait of contemporary Indian society (Rao et al., 2000).

One another key work in this analysis is Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, which builds on the myth of Bon Bibi, the guardian deity of the Sundarbans, in order to examine environmental and social issues. Ghosh's novel offers a reconfiguration to use myth to talk about environmental preservation, forced human displacement and the relationship between human and nature. As folklore and ecologically meaningful terrain, the Sundarbans turns into a field of play on which traditional beliefs confront the ecological perils of modernity (Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1798). The article will explore commonalities of these case studies like preservation of cultural memory, reinterpretations of archetypal figures, and myth as a means for interpreting modern problems in the use of myth.

Besides looking at individual works, this review will also look at the larger reception of the myth-modernity intersection in Indian English fiction. The use of references to mythology in modern literature has been stressed by literary critics who argue that they intensify the effect of modern narratives, making them both universally accessible, as well as specifically Indian. Indian English authors have bridged the local and the global, enriching world literature with a distinctive voice that engages both with the tradition as well as with contemporary global idioms of identity, justice and human rights (Nayar, 2008). Indian English fiction being able to sustain its cultural authenticity alongside its universal appeal have been possible due to this duality which has enabled it to provide recognisable diversity alongside challenging monolithic representations of culture (Kondali, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2001).

Finally, the article will conclude by discussing future research directions in this thematic framework. The role of the mythology in literature will probably continue to change due to globalization and the media. Next, authors may further extend their use of narrative strategies to include the use of cross cultural myths and discussions between Eastern and Western mythologies to treat universal issues. Following scholars, however, this trend has the potential of shaping a more connected and nuanced treatment of identity in global literature (Varughe, 2013). Through an exploration of the possibilities mentioned, this review will

emphasize the significance of Indian English fiction as an emerging, living genre which both retains and generates mythical perspectives in current storytelling.

## 2. The Evolution of Mythological Themes Over Time

### 2.1 Historical Development

Indian literature is founded on moral complexities and cultural identities as solemn and salient values of Indian civilization, which had been very solidly laid on mythological narratives and ancient epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Thousands of years old, composed, these texts have survived through oral tradition only, in the form, that has been changed and adapted to conform to the social and political reality of each epoch. This element of adaptation, although existing at the expense of the tightness of style, has enabled mythology to remain relevant and flexible, so that every retelling gathered its own specific contemporary resonance with the listener. Over the last few decades, modern Indian English authors have reimagined these ancient stories to reflect the issues of today's society and culture. The Palace of Illusions, for instance, is an alternative presentation of the Mahabharata from Draupadi's standpoint through re configuring the mythological figure of Draupadi as a woman, not of the old myth but existing in patriarchal structures today and thus presenting age-old thinking on patriarchal structures within a modern frame (Divakaruni, 2008). This serves the focus of placing mythological characters to denote struggles with agency and resilience, in a historical and present day etching in the gender and identity conflicts (Mukherjee, 2018). By such reimagining's writers build a bridge between India's ancient heredity and the rapid changing cultural consciousness, thus highlighting the eternal themes in mythology (Nayar, 2008).

### 2.2 Adaptation Across Genres

Indians' literature on mythological themes surprisingly lends itself to new forms of life within all genres of literature from magical realism to speculative fiction. Earlier literary works tended to be stricter in following the traditional narratives, and contemporary authors copy myth to give it rich, many faceted expressions in combination with the cultural memory and innovative telling of the story. For example, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, mythological tropes and archetypes are employed as conveyers of more complex postcolonial topics and the common experience of a post colonial India. Saleem Sinai as a protagonist is a modern mythic hero whose life is a mirror of the nation's historical and cultural struggles and magic realism makes his story more resonant (Rushdie, 1981). This novel demonstrates how genre blending can make mythology still relevant as a narrative tool that illuminates how imperialism, nationalism, identity and social change relates to the postcolonial India.

Indian poetry, theater and visual arts also intersperse mythological motifs on to assure the adaptability of myth and testify the impact of myth on artistic expression of different genres. For instance, poets such as Kamala Das, use the myth to create a dimension of psychological depth to discuss themes of identity and cultural alienation raising levels of contemporariness. This cross genre adaptation goes beyond retelling, it innovates by using myth to capture intimate emotional experiences that are universal in their concerns (Das, 2009). Secondly, the fusion of myth with speculative fiction enables authors to present future worlds in analogues to ancient traditions, and by extension position mythology as a changing instrument of reflection in contemporary life.

### 2.3 The Shift from Oral Tradition to Literary Representation

Of all Indian literatures it was the shift from oral to written representation which has most deeply influenced how matters mythological are depicted. From the beginning, myths were fluid, inherently so, they are to be passed down by oral tradition and so change as they pass to a new retelling, changing to suit the needs, thoughts or values of the listener. The myths' fluidity which made them culturally resonant and allowed them to adapt to society itself. But it is when these stories were rendered in literary forms that they were concentrated into certain meanings, until they became a particular type of reading on their own and a base for critical reaction. As a stable platform from which to explore individual psychology, moral ambiguity and social critique, orality to literacy transition provided to the authors a way of exploring these which may not have been as explicitly accommodated by the oral tradition (Nagarajan, 2020).

Literature has also eased the preservation of this myth to a space where its nuances and intentional re interpretations let it meet the demands of modern social concerns. For instance, by narrating environmental ethics and the issues related to human survival in an ecologically broken landscape, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh looks at the local myth of Bon Bibi—a protector spirit (revered in the Sundarbans). Through the transformation of an orally shared myth into a literary narrative, Ghosh not only places a local, ecological myth within a larger context, but one that has relevance to environmental problems that affect the entire globe, but also asks the reader to reimagine the relationship between human and nature (Ghosh, 2004). Such adaptations are proof of how relevant are the traditional stories in confronting issues of our present world, talks of practices like conservation of ecology and ethics for existence with one another.

By retaining the cultural memory within these myths and extending its place in the meaning making of modern day reader, this approach becomes a benefits to enrich our understanding of traditional values in the context of modern discourse. Myth could not have secured its place in literature without the written word, which has enabled the authors, and in turn, each successive generation of Indians, to carry on the evolutions in Indian cultural heritage. The durability of mythological themes as adapting to reflect changing societal emphases demonstrates their ongoing relevance and explicates the role of cultural continuity in an ever more globalist world.

## 3. The Role of Mythology in Indian English Fiction

The mythology has an essential, pervasive place in Indian culture serving as a historical record and moral guide which has guided many generations. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are ancient epics which tell us stories beyond just mythological

storytelling and also include the texts of Veda and Puranic. These form some very pithy texts, which contain philosophies, profound moral lessons, and cultural wisdom which have existed over centuries, and guided norms and values of the society of India at large. These texts do more than providing entertainment and education; they effectively deliver the values and beliefs that Indian society in ancient times was embarking on, some still resonate till date and affect the world to this time (Anand,1974).

Rather than mere historical records, these mythological texts, like those comprising Hindu, Jain Tirthankara, and Buddhist lore, are 'living traditions' reinvented and reimagined from generation to generation. For example, the complement of deities in the Hindu pantheon, are built around vast mythic cycles and can be associated as representing a particular virtue, challenge or ethical nuance. From these stories we learn what duty is, what happens when you are ambitious, and how being humble and compassionate has value. But Jain and Buddhist mythologies have other things to say about renunciation, self constraint, and the pursuit of enlightenment. These myths together represent various facets of the Indian spiritual and moral landscape, each tradition contributing to a rich, multi faceted cultural heritage that Indians continue to draw on for moral and spiritual guidance (Anand,1974).

In this context, Indian English fiction has used mythology to do the same, but in a different way, connecting historical knowledge with contemporary themes. Mythology is a flexible topic in modern Indian Literature in that it permits writers and creators to anchor their characters and themes in a moral and metaphysical context. In doing so, Indian writers stress not only the survival of traditional values but also their import in relation to challenges confronted by modern man and thought. Characters often become references to mythological characters, embodying archetypes and ancient themes that themselves reveal universal human problems, societal tensions, and philosophical questions (Harder et al., 2021; Poddar,1798) the same applies across centuries and cultures.

For example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) uses threads of Indian mythology and history in order to outline the intricate details of postcolonial identity. Through the embedding of mythological motifs in his narrative, Rushdie establishes a parallel between individual experiences and the 'larger forces of history'; in doing so he enables readers to experience India's struggles with the quest for independence and identity using a discourse which incorporates myth and history. Also, Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* employs mythological allusions to foreground issues of social constraints and caste dynamics, placing contemporary social critiques in a traditional ethical framework that has governed Indian society since millennia (Harder et al., 2021; Poddar,1798).

Contemporary authors like Rushdie and Roy, as well as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Amitav Ghosh, draw upon mythology as a way to tell a tale and to read (or adapt) ancient tales in the context of the present. *The Palace of Illusions*, in particular, is an imaginative reworking of the Mahabharata as written from the point of view of Draupadi, an important female figure, and brings forth issues of agency, gender and destiny into a space of patriarchal retelling. Mukherjee (2000) shows how her work of mythological reimagining not only inflects old tales on gender and autonomy but helps making the mythology relevant to present discourses.

Ghosh also shows how authors like him embed ecological and cultural narratives in mythic frameworks. Ghosh incorporates the myth of this goddess, Bon Bibi, into *The Hungry Tide*, in his attempt to utilise one goddess in specifically dealing with questions of nature, and the extremely close relationship we as humans have to nature. Ghosh uses Bon Bibi's myth to speak to a contemporary environmental consciousness, and to ask readers to rethink their relationship to nature through an ancient story that still has relevance in a world that is changing so quickly. Adaptations of this type render mythology a living and evolutionary spectrum which the authors reshape to fit into the ethical, cultural and existential needs of their era (Mukherjee, 2000).

Indian writers in English do not simply reproduce myths – they rework, reinterpret and translate them to the problems of today, and make one speak to the other. This approach makes mythology a very flexible narrative form, one that can be reinterpreted and reinvigorated in response to modern cultural, social and ethical questions. For instance, Hindu mythology is as interested with themes of dharma (duty) and karma (action and consequence) as it is with these subjects and so there is often dharma and karma in narratives about social justice, identity crises, or environmental concerns. It is with this in mind that Indian English fiction too employs mythology, not as a fossilized tradition, but as a living, malleable medium for engaging readers who will thereby appreciate not only the enduring value of the cultural, but also their immediate usefulness in contemporaneous issues (Anand,1974; Harder et al., 2021; Poddar,1798). Therefore, Indian English fiction mythology is a bridge between historical and contemporary reflections. The blending of myth and modernity in this book both appeals to the timeless and the timely, and thus creates a space where ancient wisdom meets modern consciousness, a space whose import to Indian society and beyond cannot be overemphasized.

### 3.1 Mythology as a Narrative Tool

Mythology is an important narrative tool in Indian English fiction, giving extra dimension and layering to story telling through mythological symbol and multi layered meanings. Authors have a way of communicating complex ideas in a condensed way which has a cultural resonance for an Indian audience while at the same time being able to speak to a universal theme to a global audience by drawing on mythological references and allusions which use familiar symbols. These authors are able to embed profound messages and questions about morality into their narratives via the well travelled path of mythology, a richness that appeals not only to reader's emotions but their intellect as well. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is a striking example, that uses mythological symbolism, particularly notions of rebirth and prophecy, as mythic sites to contextualize the postcolonial. In his novel, Rushdie creates his protagonist Saleem Sinai and position him as a modern mythic hero whose all life is a reflection of India's own experience that went from colonial rule to independence. As a result, Rushdie imbues Saleem's role with symbolic character, making Saleem more than an individual, but the nation itself, whose dilemmas and successes echo the entire historical and political cataclysms of India (Rushdie, 1981).



In his use of magical realism in *Midnight's Children* mythological elements are deeply entwined. Instead of escapism through fantasy, the magical occurs as part of India's rich mythic tradition and continues to articulate the surrealism that characterises the postcolonial experience, especially fragmentation and contradiction in India's national identity. With Rushdie's integration of historical and mythical timelines, his work is a unique commentary on postcolonial identity and the dissonance, dualities and ironies of a nation trying to reconcile its past with its present. In his critiques of the very basics of postcolonial Indian identity, Rushdie draws upon myth and magic to root it into and pull it away from its colonial and pre-colonial pedigrees (Krishnaswamy, 1995). Thus, this intersection of myth and modernity in Rushdie allows him to present India as a complex, layered entity, made what it is by its history, yet constantly changing a notion which has a great deal of appeal to readers inside and outside India.

Indian English fiction mythology also connects the personal story with the collective memory, the personal with the broader cultural and societal narrative. A cultural and spiritual framework for the ecological themes of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is presented through the local legend of Bon Bibi, a goddess worshipped in the Sundarbans. The embedding of the legend in Ghosh's narrative enables him to locate contemporary concerns, such as environmental conservation and humanity's attitude towards nature, within the traditional beliefs; and analysing these concerns through the eyes of what he considers to be the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. Bon Bibi functions as a moral guide and a narrative device of interdependence, between the humans and the natural world, which seem to be fixed in a natural cycle until deemed an obstacle to modern development and industrialization. It features Bon Bibi's myth in order to emphasize that ecological stewardship is as much a cultural and spiritual virtue as it is our contemporary imperative. This positioning brings the environmental themes of the novel in line with the convictions of Sundarba's local communities, which regard environmental conservation as a cultural duty as well as an essential ecological duty (Ghosh, 2004; Rao et al., 2000).

In addition, mythology in Indian fiction is, therefore, also used as an instrument to interrogate and reframe societal problems. For example, in subtle ways, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) invokes mythological themes to describe caste oppression, and caste transgression against established familial norms. Roy elevates her tragic story with mythic themes, such as forbidden love and moral consequence, grounding her tale within a larger moral narrative from which it draws parallels with traditional Indian myth. By this approach, she can delve into the deeply embedded, even business like nature of human suffering and transgression, themes alive in the thematic structures of Indian mythology. However, Roy does not simply relate a story of a woman who has suffered; rather, her putting her story within these themes helps her to shine a light on the inevitable effects of culturally and socially entrenched hierarchies and taboos, (Roy, 1997; Patil, 2020). On the one hand, these mythological allusions disclose how Indian fiction employs mythology as a supply of narrative inspiration and, on the other, reveal how Indian fiction utilises mythology as an instrument of critique and problematising prevailing social systems, thereby making her fiction each related and actual.

Mythology has emerged as an important theme in the revitalization of cultural identity as enshrined in Indian English fiction, ever since the onslaught of globalisation and cultural homogenisation. As Indian writers choose to reflect beyond the historical scope of Indian writing in English, mythological frameworks offer a means by which to thoroughly reaffirm (or otherwise) Indian cultural heritage whilst addressing current realities. These authors reinterpret mythological stories, showing how traditional beliefs can live alongside—or even be at odds with—modern life. Hindu myth is employed in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1963) to present a story deeply rooted in Indian spirituality by means of this approach. Rao parallels India's anti colonial struggle with India's anti colonial struggle in this novel, by portraying the battle for national probably as an eternal battle of good and evil, being the focal idea in Hindu mythology. Such parallels also help Rao associate the independence movement with a mythic significance in which India's modern political aspirations are colored by India's ancient moral philosophies (Rao, 1963; Varughese, 2013).

For diasporic writers, mythology is also a way of reconnecting with their heritage and of exploring questions of diasporic identity and cultural belonging. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), a narrative reclaiming a typically male dominated story through a feminist frame, Draupadi, a traditional figure of the Mahabharata, is retold. Revisiting an ancient tale, Divakaruni, by concentrating on Draupadi's life, examines questions of female agency and autonomy in the mythological, as well as, in the modern context. This retelling of the novel from Draupadi's point of view makes it possible to analyze the dynamics of gender roles and restrictions of traditional expectations, and with exceptional relevance to readers immersed in contemporary gender dynamics. By visualizing this reimagining, Divakaruni links her diasporic audience to Indian culture but demonstrates that mythological tales can be made to resurface the values of today – be it equality and empowerment of women (Divakaruni, 2008; Mukherjee, 2000).

As a result, mythology becomes a more than narrative device in Indian English fiction; it is an expression of cultural touchstone that authors utilise to examine, and reshape the Indian identity. With this engagement they are able to embark on and critique societal issues, face historical injustices, and celebrate India's very diverse cultural heritage. Indian authors (it should be noted that I'm speaking mainly of Indian English writing, here) use mythology as both narrative and thematic framework for stories that speak on several levels at once — storied in tradition while retaining relevance to readers of today. Thus, mythology becomes for Indian writers a tool to bridge the past and the present, offering a singularly powerful lens through which to observe India's still in progress outward definition of self and inner resistance to destruction (Nayar, 2008). Indian fiction draws on the give and take of myth and modernity; presenting its readers stories that are as timeless in their universal themes as they are modern in their relevance.

#### 4. Themes of Modernity in Indian Fiction

##### 4.1 Understanding Modernity

The notion of modernity does not contain only of adoption of Western ideas or technological advancement. In the spiritual sense, it is the quintessence of a profound social and cultural, and philosophical change paradigm. This transformation finds

its imprint in literary aspects of life, modernism narrating as a complex narrative which is an ensemble of traditional fabrics, colonial history, wider impacts of neo liberal policy and Western cultural elements. All of this does a great deal to shape the present face of Indian English fiction.

Modernity is the site of a conflict in Indian literature in which long held beliefs are challenged and rearticulated. The stories frequently struggle with the conflict between the past and the present that is coming into being, and show a society in transition. When authors explore into their characters' lives, they realize how modernity influences personal identity, social structure and family phenomena (Nagarajan, 2019).

Among this exploration of social modernity Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) is a critical cornerstone. This novel, in eloquently sharing its narrative subtly unfolds the caste based injustice that stained the Indian society for about centuries. Anand creates a literary voice that is progressive and humanist that opposes the oppressive structures at play in social interactions, thereby leaving subsequent generations of writers room to contemplate these issues. As the protagonist's journey, the reader is exposed to the harsh realities of the caste system which incites empathy and requires a revision of the taken for granted standards of society (Anand, 1935).

The theme of transformation can be further illuminated through R.K. Narayan's works, *The Guide* (1958), in particular. It shows traditional characters trying to negotiate their identities with what they believe to be happening in society because of modernisation. Narayan fashions the spirit of Indian culture in the difficult life of modern times and lets his readers enjoy the characters' arduous trips and successes while they try to come to terms with their past and endeavor to make their future (Narayan, 1958). Modern in Indian fiction become a window to apply in understanding how change influences both individual's life and communal's identity in this transitional phase that have its complexities (Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1798).

#### 4.2 Urbanization vs. Globalization

Urbanization and globalization have come to symbolize defining forces weaving a new thematic weave to contemporary Indian fiction. Through the realizations of urban life, the characters speak directly of the rapidity of change, the loneliness of metropolitan life, and the stark mutability between wealth and poverty. In addition to being a physical displacement of characters, this exploration of urban life functions as a metaphor for the larger socio-economic changes that are shaping contemporary India.

One such poignant example of this theme is Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) a narrative capturing the complexities of modern urban existence. In Adiga's work, Balram serves as the character who leaves his rural homelands to seek success in the city; through his character he critiques the darker side of globalization. The novel draws readers towards economic disparity and moral compromise that people making decisions while trying to sail right in through the roughest waters off urban life face (Adiga, 2008; Gupta, 2020). It depicts the struggle of class, and the harshest realities of the life in a fast globalizing economy which remain relevant for many in Indian society even today. The *Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri, which also addresses the topic of globalization but through the analysis of the immigrant experience. The narrative revolves around characters that live between two cultures: American and Indian. Lahiri brings poignantly the feelings of displacement and identity crisis that is synonymous with this life as a second generation. Lahiri, (2003) looks at tensions and opportunities coming from living in a globalized world, through her protagonist Gogol Ganguli, who she illustrates can expand and fragment cultural identity at the same time. The characters tend to struggle with a sense of belonging in between two cultures and their competing cultural forces are the ones that influence the characters lives (Chandra & N.D.R. et al., 2005).

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) gives us the historical origin of India's connection with the global trade network as a consequence of opium trade. It's a very interesting, layered group of characters whose lives are entwined in the colonial as well as the global project. Ghosh's story shows the disruption of traditional ways of life brought by the forces of global commerce; it's also the story of its far reaching impact on Indian society (Ghosh, 2008). According to Ghosh, by placing individual storytelling in the larger historical context of change, here urbanisation and globalisation stand as crucial threads in understanding the complexities of modern life in India.

The interplay traditional values with the present aspirations and the immense transformation in the physical and cultural landscape with a continued reshaping as a result of urbanization makes it an interesting phenomenon to study in India. A tension between tradition and modernity is often experienced by characters in contemporary Indian fiction finding themselves trapped in the present-past dialectic. Rather than presenting the changing cultural values and economic structures, this exploration invites its readers to comprehend the depths of changes taking place in Indian society (Kondali, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2001).

#### 4.3 Individualism vs. Collectivism

There is a marked tension in modern Indian fiction between individualism and collectivism; the challenge for ambition within a culturally rich, if demanding, social order comes to the fore. The journeys of these characters illustrate the changes taking place culturally in India as the emphasis is on individual autonomy and the individual in this country versus the deep seated emphasis on family and community.

In Indian society, as opposed to a having individual values based in a Western construct, the values of collectivism are more typical; they celebrate the family honor, duty, and social harmony. Focusing on *Virmati*, the central female figure of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) is a good example of this conflict. Using Kapur's narrative, I explore the cultural tensions surrounding attempts at artificial individuation by women who desire autonomy in a collectivist society and the social consequences of individual choices. *Virmati*'s story tells the story of the challenge between one's self assertion and responsibilities with one's family (Kapur, 2010; Sharma & Chandra 2021).

Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) continues to explore individualism, with protagonist Lata having to choose between following individual desires for personal happiness or fulfilling traditional expectations of an arranged marriage and family

honor. The inner facades of Lata's dilemma to strike a balance between free will and familial obligation have been wonderfully and simply portrayed by Seth. The narrative investigates the tensions resulting from the compromises and negotiations surrounding the boundaries of who may have their identity acknowledged as identities are asserted by the individuals who engage in the navigating of societal norms (Seth, 1993). Indian fiction uses these narratives to discuss the psychological and social effects of individualism in a deeply social, at least in terms of values and the force of cohesion on whose backs, familial India. (Mishra, 2015; Bhyrappa's, 2024)

The discussion of individualism and collectivism continues to be complicated by Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), which portrays a disparate group of disadvantaged individuals forming an unexpected collective none of whom conform to 'traditional' social structures. Roy's characters personify a new concept of community emerging towards the individual finding a home and a place to support his mutual outside the family framework. Such exploration of nontraditional relationships and self-determined identities represents always evolving borders between collectivism and individualism in a fast changing modern Indian society and illustrates how people create spaces to belong in a constantly changing world (Roy, 2017; Thakre & Musale, 2022).

The conjunctions of modernity, urbanisation, globalization, individualism and collectivism play an integral role in the development of the contemporary Indian fiction. Authors write to reflect on the complexities of modern life, the tensions and transformation that characterize the Indian experience in a rapidly changing world. Not only do these themes reveal the characters' internal struggles to come to terms with their identities, but they also comment, in a sustained way, on the logic of social and cultural interactions of modern Indian society.

Indian literature, as a space for articulating movement from tradition to modernity, from individual aspiration to collective identity continues to be an important area for exploration. Author's like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Aravind Adiga, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Manju Kapur, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy present rich insights into different version of modernity at play and fomates, in their works, that the readers can throw light upon this in the context of varied min stamps, which Indian identity is formed.

Seen through this lens, modern Indian English fiction is seen as a mapping of changing times, as well as a place to challenge and re-tool cultural practices in order to attain a more nuanced comprehension of the complexity of the Indian experience.

## 5. Key Authors and Texts Integrating Myth and Modernity

### 5.1 Prominent Authors

To have a deep look at the indian english literature, we have to explore the history for the last decades, when the indian literary work has moved up towards the exploration of vast and different motifs and styles of writings that shows an image of the great Indian society dealing with the present time. In this evolution, there are several authors who skilfully blend mythology with modernity. The blending used allows writers to take up contemporary issues through our rich tapestry of traditional narratives. A trend of this sort, among authors like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, involves the use of mythological motifs not merely as decorative matter but as a critical framework interrogating social, political, and existential questions that correspond to modern India (Anand, 1974).

This synthesis of myth and modernity has many purposes. It provides a way to look at India's fractured identity in the postcolonial context, critiques socio political realities and engages with questions of agency, especially in terms of gender dynamics. Revision of the work of Rushdie, Roy and Divakaruni illustrates how myth can be a potent instrument to traverse and evaluate the dynamics of day to day Indian life.

The generic perception of mythology as a relic of the past is contradicted by what mythology means in contemporary literature and in particular, in the Indian context. This provides a lens for authors to look at the present from an ancient frame to modern dilemma. As explained above, the use of myth is not mere storytelling in literature, but it is used in literature to tell us about identity, cultural heritage, and the socio political environment in which people live.

It's a living myth, within Indian literature, always changing, rather than a fixed representation of what happened at some point in history. It enables authors to interact with familiar stories whilst also exposing the realities of today. With this, these writers travel the convolutions of modernity, to show the importance of myth in knowing about today's issues.

*Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie (1981) is classically paradigmatic of the union of mythological allusions with classic modern stories. The book follows the life of Saleem Sinai, who is born at the exact same moment as India's independence. Rushdie uses mythological motifs through this narrative structure in order to capture the post independence India: a fragmented identity, a personal history interwoven with national histories.

The 'magic realist' nature of the story, i.e. the use of a genre in which reality and fantasy overlap, allows Rushdie to introduce myth as a device that extends the story in a highly figurative way. Saleem, for instance, is quite literally the country's metaphorical conduit by which trauma and aspiration flow. His personal struggles parallel the difficult journey of India; the pace at which India's cultural heritage continues to affect its current life (Rushdie, 1981; Halpé, 2010).

*Midnight's Children* is full of mythological underpinnings. In Hindu epics and folklore, as well as the socio political landscape of India, Rushdie's references to them not only enrich the narrative, but serve also to critique the same. Chaos of postcolonial India with its all myriad identities, struggles, and contradictions are reflected by the novel. Rushdie employs myth to connect with the past and argue how modernity is certainly influenced by the past; Indian identity fragmenting from its diverse and myriad strands – a result of the separation that colonialism caused.

Another pivotal work in the genre is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), which weaves mythic elements into the fabric of its narrative in a complex way. Through these complexities of caste politics, familial trauma and forbidden love the novel unveils Kerala's socio cultural context. Roy's use of myth as a hermeneutic tool illuminates the perpetuity of the ancient archetypes within their contemporary struggle's vis a vis struggles around class, gender and social injustice.

Roy references myth often and the references are usually subtle, but impactful. This reference to the “small things” is invoked by itself in the title. ROY critiques societal norms that have led to oppression and marginalization using intimate experiences of characters, so that these experiences align with the grand narratives of history itself. It oscillates between past and present as a structure of the novel reflects the cyclical nature of trauma and memory about how the history of life affects the individual life (Roy, 1997).

In addition, the story of Roy incorporates an Indian mythological aspect and compares it to the lives of her characters. The mythic dimension deepens the analysis of caste politics, showing the extent to which held beliefs continue to inform those relationships. Roy’s critique of societal injustices transcends the personal to become political and invites readers to rethink the junctures of history, identity, and culture in a modern India.

In the Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) gives a fresh and feminist reading of the Mahabharata. The novel is a retelling of the epic story from the character point of view of the woman Draupadi. What this retelling does is not only resists the banality of myth, but also questions craft and gender dynamics, even amidst a desert sun.

Divakaruni’s challenge to traditional interpretations of the Mahabharata is based on her provision of a modern voice to Mahabharata’s Draupadi, this voice provides a bold delineation of the complexities of womanhood, both in the realm of the mythological as well as of the contemporary. In this thesis, Draupadi’s character is used as a vessel in interrogating the themes of power, resilience, and resistance to patriarchal structures. By means of her narrative, Divakaruni closes the gap between the epic past and the issues of the present time and demonstrates the significance of mythology for the solution of the problems of gender relationship in modern society (Divakaruni, 2008; Naya, 2008).

In using mythical motifs, Divakaruni is involving with the heritage of India but concurrently challenging the cultural norms that continue to prohibit women. Reclaiming Draupadi’s voice carries two layers of meanings; one is the tribute to the myth and the other is that the stories of women should find a place in the larger body of Indian literature.

Mythology and modernity are intermixed in the works of Rushdie, Roy, and Divakaruni, which furnish a strong position from which to critique contemporary issues in Indian society. These authors, through continued interaction of traditional narratives, emphasize the continuous impact of myth on the formation of cultural identity and habits in the society. The narratives of these stories address urgent social, political, and existential questions of modern Indian life.

These authors share a few things in common, including using mythology as a means to work towards social injustices. An examination of the political landscape of the postcolonial India, *Midnight’s Children* pulls apart the fractures of national identity arising from a historically unjust past by Rushdie. The novel reminder of existence of legacies of colonialism that still affects contemporary society, which forced readers to face the fact about power and privilege.

Similarly, caste politics and the social hierarchies are shown to be ever present in Roy’s, *The God of Small Things*. Roy intertwines myth and personal narrative to reveal the injustices of an individual marginalized, and to point to the urgent needs of empathy and understanding in a country divided. A poignant critique, both of the societal norms proscribing discrimination and inequality and of the familial trauma and forbidden love that spawned the displacement of one of our most famous novelists.

*The Palace of Illusions* by Divakaruni greatly adds to this significance as regards myth in a discussion of gender dynamics and agency. Divakaruni rescripts Draupadi’s story in order to critique the patriarchal structures and exhort the winning of compatriots in women. Her developing narrative actively invites rethinking of women’s traditional roles in both myth and contemporary society, and also of claiming agency in adversity.

The other important aspect of the interplay of mythology with modernity in Indian literature is the theme of identity and belonging. As in Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children*, the exploration by Rushdie of fragmented identity in a post-independence India, that characterised the realities of the amalgamation of cultural heritage and modern aspirations of the people in India. Through its genre, plot development, and characterization, the novel confronts its readers in gestures that remind them of how our identities are determined by historical contexts and how tradition and modernity negotiate in on going practices to produce our current state of being.

As is also the case with Roy’s narrative, the questions of identity, and more specifically the caste and social status, are handled. In *The God of Small Things* the characters battle their place in the inflexible society hierarchy, and how the social expectations you have to live with affect the personal relationships. Roy intertwines myth and realism, to emphasize the value of recognizing and questioning the structures that make up notions of identity in modern India.

A feminist reinvention of Draupadi’s story, Divakaruni’s novel recruits readers to rethink continuously changing concepts of identity and identity formation within a gendered experience. Divakaruni challenges the social norms that limit a female inside a male-dominated narrative by centering a female voice. Draupadi’s journey comes to symbolise resilience and self discovery, functioning as something by which other people may read their own experience of identity and belonging.

At the end, it is learnt that mythology with modernity function as an effective tool for contemporary issues in Indian English literature. Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are perhaps the best known of Indian authors who have skillfully utilized mythological motifs to bring into play social, political and existential questions relevant to modern India. These writers’ narratives develop strands of complexity into how we understand and practice identity, belonging, social injustice, and the enduring hold that myth has on cultural discourse.

## 5.2 Case Studies of Selected Texts

Salman Rushdie takes a chaotic transformation of postcolonial India, and by masterfully merging the mythic with the mundane, makes sense of it. Not only is he a protagonist, Saleem Sinai is a symbol for India, representing the nation’s collective struggles, and aspirations, its turbulence. Saleem is born at the very moment when India is born, and his life is colored by and mirrors the life of the nation. Saleem’s special talents, like being able to telepathically communicate with other children born at midnight on August 15, 1947, as Rushdie does, reflect the fragmented and multi faceted nature of the postcolonial Indian state. Rushdie



mobilizes mythological tropes, most notably prophecy, fate and rebirth used to shape the story as an allegory, both profoundly personal and national in character (Rushdie, 1981).

Rushdie illustrates how in a rapidly modernizing nation seamlessness exists between personal & political identities in that he merges Saleem's personal journey with India's historical trajectory. While the mythological elements serve only for decoration, through them Rushdie is able to condemn both colonialism and postcolonial nationalism in India and to show the contradictions and complexity involved in creating an Indian national identity based on a sprawling cultural weave. For example, the midnight's children themselves are a symbol of the fractured nature of India's identity, each child representing a different part of the nation, and a different part of India's vast linguistic, religious and cultural diversity. Saleem's slide into fractured selfhood is an allegory for a country trying to shake free of a colonial past and create a whole national identity against modernity (Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1978). *Midnight's Children* provides readers a window to understanding the subtleties of identity in a postcolonial landscape, combining the myth and the reality of this intersection, into an intimate and epic tale of modern India.

Like *The God of Small Things* (hereafter TGST) of Arundhati Roy further demonstrates the ways in which the reserve of mythology is exploited to identify the contemporary problems, particularly the problems of social stratification and the problem of love considered illicit and promiscuous. Central to Roy's narrative is the rich draw she makes from Hindu myth and traditional storytelling techniques to give her story a timeless quality that is not beholden to the particularities of place and time. And one could witness characters like Ammu, the lover of Velutha an untouchable, to reflect Roy's sharp stinging criticize on India's open caste system and gender oppression. In Ammu's plight we can hear mythic themes of defiance and sacrifice as her character becomes tragic, perhaps even archetypal, defiant of the moral and societal codes which have been set upon her. For Roy (1997) and (Mishra, 2015; Bhyrappa's, 2024), her love is both an intimate tragedy, and a commentary on the oppressive structures that tell Indians who can love whom in this in between era dominated by the oppressive social hierarchy of India.

Through the use of mythological and traditional storytelling, Roy is able to put these social critiques in a broader cultural and moral context, and thus allows readers to think about problems of caste, gender, and identity on an emotionally deep level. Through her invocation of mythic themes of love forbidden, familial duty, societal retribution, Roy highlights the durability of these conflicts, hinting that the shackles her characters labor under are part of a broader, cyclical cycle of social injustice. By opening up the book to the readership of the world, this approach simultaneously brings a universality to *The God of Small Things*: it allows for readers of different cultures to recognise something familiar with society, while also... offering a pointed critique of how Indian society is yet to truly shake off some of the historical, deeply entrenched structures of social stratification.

The myth of Bon Bibi, goddess worshiped by the Sundarbans people, is used by Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* to deal with the themes of environmental conservation, and human resilience. The novel uses the legend of Bon Bibi as a cultural framework to ground the interactions of the characters with their environment in a belief system which recognises and respects that which is natural. Ghosh uses this myth to explore the interdependence of humanity and nature, and to show that ecological problems cannot be disentangled from cultural and spiritual values. Ghosh situates the story among Bon Bibi's myth and shows how the cultural heritage is useful to address some contemporary ecological issues (Ghosh, 2004).

Characters, especially figures who live in the Sundarbans region and face marginalization, regard the figure of Bon Bibi as a protector of the Sundarban as moral and spiritual guide. For Ghosh, the myth of Bon Bibi has its own run in the narrative, as an active force which determines the moral compass of the characters, making them see nature not as a resource, but a sacred thing to be respected. Through his anchoring of his ecological themes in the myth of Bon Bibi, Ghosh locates environmental stewardship as a cultural imperative and not simply as the domain of the latter day modern or western mind. For its part, the reverence for Bon Bibi is a message from Ghosh about the need to respect the reciprocal, reciprocal relationship with nature, in other words, he reminds us of the need to coexist with the nature, and that is both culturally resonant and universally relevant (Grisham, Anke, 2019). This approach shows how mythology can be a strong narrative device to situate present day issues in a traditional worldview, and thus, to see environmental ethics as an integral part of cultural identity.

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni retells the Mahabharata's heroine, Draupadi, counter narrating a nuanced version of who she was, touching on themes so contemporary: female autonomy and resilience. Yet, Divakaruni revises Draupadi's traditional and patriarchal portrait through her feminist gaze and provides her her voice and agency discordant with the traditional perceptions of the epic. This is an important feminist reinterpretation, as Draupadi's character emerges from a self confident, defiant person against the demands of society. Divakaruni uses Draupadi's viewpoint to illuminate issues of gender inequality and personal empowerment, drawing readers into a situation that strikes close to the relationship problems many live today and that is about social justice (Divakaruni, 2008).

Divakaruni retells Draupadi's story, and in doing so, attempts to shine the light of today's gendered struggles, through the life of Draupadi as a kind of mirror for today's gender equality and empowerment discourse. Draupadi's experiences, her anger, her desires, her suffering, are not marginalised any more, but in fact they are the story: the complications of female autonomy within the context of a deeply patriarchal society. Divakaruni reimagines an ancient character not only providing a new view of an old narrative but challenging the readers to rethink the traditional narratives around gender roles in Indian society. According to Mukherjee, (2000), the *Palace of Illusion* shows how the mythology can be recalibrated to persist with new political and social beliefs, as it could be used as a dilatory vehicle of social enlightenment and scrutinization. By giving Draupadi a voice that embodies contemporary feminist principles, Divakaruni probes the myth to utilize its potential to connect the remote past with the present, and therefore allowing its readers to participate in participatory engagement with the myth as relevant and transformative.

Mythology in all these works plays the role of a device for the Indian English writers in dissecting the conflicting coexistence of the traditional and the modern, commenting on the multifaceted details of identity, cultural legacy and modifications.

Rushdie, Roy, Ghosh and Divakaruni rework the mythological narratives to produce stories that bear the hallmarks of their Indianness and are yet amazingly contemporary in their relevance. Engaging with colonial heritage, social inequalities, environmental ethics and gender equity, they deploy the ancient to remark on the modern via myth. Not only do these narratives preserve cultural significance of myth, but they adapt it to respond to concerns of the globalized, modern world. Thus, howsoever dynamic, the engagement with mythology, here, as elsewhere in Indian English fiction, emphasizes continuities, its role as an implicit source of inspiration, critique and cultural affirmation, bridging the past with the present and across time and space.

### 5.3 Character Archetypes and Mythological Allusions

An archetype from mythology is commonly invoked by Indian English authors in their characters to give them coherence, making possible a perception of them within the larger cultural and symbolic plane. Modern narratives abound with the mythological archetypes of the hero, the trickster and the martyr, which help us understand our contemporary characters and conflicts (Anand, 1974).

Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* is an archetype of hero-prophet; his fate is bound up in the fate of his nation. By virtue of his powers of telepathy and as one of India's 'midnight's children' he becomes a mythic figure standing for the potential and the vulnerabilities of India in the postcolonial era. In India, defined by modernity on top of the shreds of colonial rule, Saleem's journey mirrors the archetypal hero's quest filled with trials and discoveries (Rushdie, 1981; Singh, 2017).

Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* can also be read in the mould of the tragic heroine. Her fight against the norms of societal and fight for injustices she faces represent traditional and modern feminism. Divakaruni then utilises Draupadi's character to question the customary passive roles of women given in mythology, furnishing them with a strong independent female protagonist (Divakaruni, 2008; Nayar, 2008).

The God of Small Things illustrates the concept of the martyr archetype as Velutha, and his ill-fated unlawful relationship with Ammu ultimately results in his death. The mythic themes of sacrifice and purity in love are acted out in his fate, in these rigid social hierarchies which control his destiny. The presentation of Velutha as he is is a work of critique with the cruelty of society, where he is imbued with all the trappings of the supernatural, for each story is a tale of a person's eternal battle against the oppressor, and their oppression, without which no story exists in the universe (Roy, 1997; Patil, 2020).

## 6. Impact of Myth-Modernity Intersection on Readers

### 6.1 Cultural Resonance

Indian English fiction mixes up mythology and modern themes and strikes a chord not only with Indian but, also with international readers, and spins stories which respect their cultural heritage, yet belonging to the complexities of present time. These narratives act as a powerful reminder for Indian readers of ancestral traditions and values while presenting age old stories as constituent, breathing parts of contemporary society. Epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata based Indian mythology continues to fascinate because of its powerful moral messages, archetypal characters and problems of ethicality. As common cultural symbols, they encourage nostalgia; enable Indian readers to partake in mythological narrative frameworks and thereby reflect how exis-tent views and actions might be driven by past values (Singh, 2019; Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1798).

Authors such as *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy use mythology for poetic ends, but also as a way to call up the elements of cultural memory, and challenge the reader to offer the culturally relevant critique of both past and present. For example, in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie uses myth to make the story of Saleem Sinai resonate deeper by using his personal story to link India's national experience so that readers share a symbolic universe where individual life and collective destiny play off each other (Rushdie, 1981). Through the intertwining of similarly familiar symbols like prophecy and fate throughout Saleem's experiences, Rushdie conjures a mythical quality that will hold with Indian audiences who will see reflections of their own history in Saleem's life.

Meanwhile, these myth laden narratives are an entry point into the Indian cultures to international audiences. Mythological symbolism makes universal themes, such as identity, belonging, and justice, more profound. For instance, *The God of Small Things* uses myth to express its critique of the caste system and the social hierarchy in some strands of symbolism in evocative storytelling, which introduces India's socio-cultural nuances globally to readers (Roy, 1997; (Mishra, 2015; Bhyrappa's, 2024). Roy and her contemporaries explore deeply rooted myths and societal norms in order to open up doors to an intercultural understanding without boundaries.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* takes that a step further by presenting a reinterpretation of the life of Draupadi, one of the most famed female characters in the Mahabharata from a feminist perspective. Through reimagined Draupadi's story and her work, Divakaruni shows the malleability of a myth. In particular, international readers, especially women, may find in Draupadi's resilience a universal story of the triumph of women's empowerment, telling a story which is universal and imbedded within the stories of gender equality, women's rights in today's discourses (Divakaruni, 2008; Mukherjee, 2000). With this approach she reasserts that myths are neither the fossils of bygone times, nor one time events, but ongoing stories that affect and invigorate contemporary readings throughout different cultures.

### 6.2 Shaping National Identity

Indian English fiction is a means to redefine contemporary Indian identity by shaping and redefining Indian Indian identity by using a significant prognosis of myth and modernity. Rushdie, Roy and Ghosh use mythology to create visions of India, which are respectful of India's rich cultural roots, but at the same time challenge and enlarge India's national identity. To the same end, these authors offer the readers a narrative that reflects India as a country that appreciates its traditions and works with the more progressive, modern ideas (Nayar, 2008; Anand, 1974). Mythology is used in *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie in

its role to embody India's difficult road from colonialism to independence, and that Saleem Sinai is a representation of India's identity. Saleem's life is one of extraordinary symbolism of rebirth and destiny much like India's postcolonial reality is one of immense optimism and struggle. In Saleem's odyssey, Rushdie organizes a vision of India as a nation at once struggling with its colonial past and aiming to define its own indigeneity. Thus, his work has been decisive in outlining a postcolonial Indian identity that suffuses pluralism, resilience, and introspection in response to the complexities of its history (Rushdie, 1981; Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1798).

Likewise, in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy myth is used to contest the harsh caste and gender oppression hierarchical structures Indian society still possesses. Roy critiques the social norms that marginalize certain people based on caste and gender, integrating mythological themes of forbidden love and familial ostracism into her story of the placement within a larger moral and social order. Ammu and other such characters, who are often rejected by society for practicing their love, represent defiance and sacrifice, thus repositioning Roy's novel as a reforming source for Indian society. As a result, Roy's works invite readers to imagine an India that is less oppressive, more empathetic, and more socially diverse both by subverting those oppressive norms and by preserving the spirit of the nation's cultural heritage (Roy 1997; Patil, 2020).

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* integrates the legend of Bon Bibi, a venerated local goddess of Sundarbans, with the story's concern with issues pertaining to environmental concerns and social justice and presents another such perspective regarding national identity. Bon Bibi's myth provides a moral fable for understanding the human—nature relationship and in reminding its characters of their communal duty with regard to ecological conservation. By giving us this myth, Ghosh accentuates the necessity of synthesis between progress and respect for cultural heritage, environmental stewardship, laying the foundation for an alternative rendering of Indian identity which combines cultural values with modern moral imperatives. *The Hungry Tide* reimagines national identity in this way that is ecologically aware, diverse and united against ecological challenges (Ghosh, 2004; Rao et al., 2000).

### 6.3 Literary Criticism and Reception

Though Indian English literature's blending of myth and modern themes has attracted considerable critical scrutiny of this tendency within both literary and cultural frames, the implications of such a combination continue to elude systematic inquiry. Numerous critics recommend this method for fusing complex narrative methods with wealthy, but deep India traditions, building works which can be obtainable to a universal audience even though still firmly Indian (Anand, 1974; Singh, 2017).

Many critics praise Indian multifaceted identity, represented with the help of magic realism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* which is an oft-loved work and celebrated as pioneer work in the postcolonial literature canon. The mythic and supernatural aspect to this approach mirrors India's chaotic journey through the 20th century, as the story unfolds. Rushdie's unusual way with narrative structures is a nonlinear, fragmented, stream of consciousness type of a story, which is reflective of India's heterogeneous cultural composition. The success of his novel has highlighted the possibility of the Indian English literature addressing intricate postcolonial themes and other later writers have started to explore equally intricate representations of national identity (Rushdie, 1981; Harder et al., 2021; Poddar, 1798).

Likewise, there has been great scholarly interest in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, with critics tending to emphasize her employment of mythological allusions in order to subvert India's social hierarchies. The critics praised the novel for this deep, poetic beauty of the language and the symbolism but also found Roy deftly employing the technique to bludgeon the reader with pain and anger over issues such as caste and exclusion. With myth, Roy turns her critical view of Indian social structures into a narrative that allows her to interrogate injustice and resilience in universal terms (Roy 1997; Mishra, 2015; Bhyrappa's, 2024).

A few reviews of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* have acclaimed it for its feminist reworking of Draupadi's story, in that her version of Draupadi disobeys the gender roles within the Indian mythology. In retelling Draupadi's life from her point of view, Divakaruni presents us with a novel which reverberates with the contemporary discourse of gender equality and women's empowerment. The reception of the novel reveals its importance as a work that recovers Indian mythology for contemporary feminist readers, and enlarges the range of Indian mythological narratives to include the changing social values (Divakaruni, 2008; Nayar, 2008).

## 7. Challenges in Combining Mythology with Modernity

### 7.1 Integrating Mythology with Modern Themes

Intersection in literature of mythology with the themes of the present day is a very interesting and fertile field, but it is seen to be riddled with a myriad of critical issues. One of the biggest problems with blending mythology with contemporary themes is finding a suitable equilibrium between traditional narrative framings and modern telling styles. With its old start, mythology frequently complies with archetypal edifices or moral frameworks which possibly contradict more complicated, even at times morally unclear situations of modern literary works (Anand, 1974). That creates a dissonance between authors and the risk that authors will dilute the origin significance of some myths or oversimplify modern narratives by the archetypes of mythic age and tell reductive stories.

### 7.2 Narrative Structures: The Complexity

Mythological stories play a significant role in narrative and are frequently told with a story because they arose from a particular cultural context, and because they're used for moral lessons, telling historical truths, or reflecting the values of particular communities. Of course, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient Indian literature, *Mahabharata* contains the meaning of dharma (duty/righteousness) and the complexity of human emotions. Its archetypal characters keep across generations, but neurotically fumble their way through ethical dilemmas that we can continue to relate to. Though, modern storytelling often

emphasizes moral ambiguity and character development, things that don't go well with a moral black and white framework common to most mythological stories.

For example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* employs magical realism and mythologies to create a layered story that signifies the complex socio – political identity of India. The historical and the mythical are juxtaposed in the novel, the personal and the political are woven together through the lives of its protagonists, who are born at the moment of India's independence. While this subtle mixing can be daunting especially for the readers who are not already familiar with extensive references to the mythological facts, they can alienate the audience or complicate its interpretation (Rushdie, 1981). The complex interplay between myth and reality in such texts means, as Harder, (2021) & Poddar, (1798) points out, such texts often require such a depth of cultural literacy that may be inaccessible to some readers.

Additionally, there can be a divergence in their stylistic differencing. Storytellers accustomed to modern narrative techniques, may have a hard time drawing in readers who are used to being told stories through the lens of myth, and which employ antiquated language or structure. As a result, authors have to change their by recording stories in a way that will reach contemporary audiences while keeping the messages of the story intact.

### 7.3 Traditional Audience Expectations

Authors must also work within the frame of expectation from traditional audience who may expect the retelling of mythology not reinterpretations. On the one hand, we have Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, which reimagines the Mahabharata, but from Draupadi's point of view. Divakaruni here reads agency, identity and empowerment through the lens of one of the epic's most complex, ambiguous characters – in this feminist retelling. Her portrayal of Draupadi is popular with modern readers, but has been criticized by some traditionalists who say that the novel strays too far from the original Mahabharata portrayal (Divakaruni, 2008; Singh, 2017) informs us that both the modern and the traditional present a challenge to a writer; we have the traditional narratives to honor; however, we also have to present them in modern sensibilities.

The tension that exists in the inability of authors to negotiate their interpretations of mythology clearly highlights the difficulties authors face in the interpretation of the mythology. In balancing innovation with reverence for cultural heritage, their reinterpretations may not resonant with all of the audiences. There is always a balancing act, and a keen awareness of cultural sentiments as well as a responsible storytelling commitment to each.

The Mythological Adaptation and Cultural Sensitivity having mythological themes is important, and when portraying those themes, cultural sensitivity is important because we live in a country which is diverse, with India being a multi-faceted society, and when a religious or a mythological figure has a great personal meaning to someone. Adapted for contemporary readers however, authors run the risk of offending religious sanctity or accusations of misusing holy symbols (Mishra, 2015; Bhayappa's, 2024).

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (MIT Press, 1999), mythological allusions to caste dynamics and forbidden love, were lauded and condemned in equal part. Roy's use of mythological references to critique socio political issues was criticized by some who argued that the very myths she was referencing could be trivialized by her use of them (Roy, 1997; Patil, 2020). The hazardousness of retrieving mythological elements and passing them on in new light is showed by this incident; whilst artists have a freedom to express themselves, it is something that is too delicate to accommodate a lot of reinterpreting, as demonstrated by the disrespect shown towards one of the most sacred festivals – Easter.

A compounding of the complexity of cultural sensitivity arises through authorizing gender role reevaluation from within the mythological framework. Some readers may find empowering in Divakaruni's feminist re telling of Draupadi's life itself a critique of patriarchy embedded in traditional myths that are themselves part myth, part tradition whereas other readers might feel alienated from it as a deviation from accepted norms. Mukherjee, (2000) attributes such reinterpretations as causing strong reactions from audiences who believe that subject matter from the second and third categories are disrespectful or inauthentic. Upon realization of this, authors need to learn how to utilize the mythological characters in a way that is consistent with present day gender, class, and morality radical thinking without letting their reverence fade.

### 7.4 The Role of Gender in Mythological Narratives

It is an especially contentious area of the reinterpretation of gender roles within mythological contexts. However, traditional mythological narratives tend to reinforce patriarchal values and gender stereotypes. However, recent authors have been challenging these norms by bringing alternative narratives that depict women's agency and perspective. A prime example for this trend is Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. Divakaruni not only reclaims the agency of one of the character, Draupadi by telling the Mahabharata from her point of view, but also questions the patriarchal structures that order her life. Modern feminist discourses resonate with this approach, and it provides a fresh take on a well worn narrative.

But such reinterpretations aren't without backlash. Traditionalists might claim that these adaptations of the modern are watering down the original narratives or distorting the cultural and moral teachings which came with them. Therefore this conflict illustrates the importance of the author to immerse himself in a knowledge of the source material and his reflection of values and state of society at present. In fact, the challenge is in developing narratives that pay homage to old myths but that also persuasively promote more progressive interpretations that are able to keep up with contemporary gender shifts.

### 7.5 Themes of Environment and Cultural Exploitation

The challenges of including stories from mythological backgrounds in modern tales extends further into the ability to project environmental topics through the lenses of mythological frameworks. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the myth of Bon Bibi is used as a symbol of the goddess Bon Bibi, whom the local Sundarbans community regards as a goddess. This myth is used by Ghosh to talk about environmental issues, and to point out the symbiotic relationship between people and nature. Ghosh weaves environment narratives with mythological content, drawing attention to the ecological crisis, and also



acknowledging the local cultural practice. Yet, by re-scripting Bon Bibi's myth into an environmentalist narrative, Ghosh runs the danger of converting a sacred cultural symbol to a literary trope (Ghosh 2004; Rao et al., 2000)

Through myth and environmentalism, this article explores the uses sacred symbols can be put to in contemporary agendas. In this case, while Ghosh may try to bring to the light of pressing environmental issues they may be perceived to be creating misinterpretations and disrespect to the Sadhus. As authors, we must be careful that our adaptations do not trivialize or put our sacred stories into a 'commoditization' mode.

The conclusion is that integrating myth with contemporary themes presents a complex and multifaceted challenge for such a 'fusion' of mythology and contemporary themes in literature, with consideration of narrative structures, cultural sensitivity and audience expectations. Authors such as Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh have revealed through their works the difficulties associated with providing opportunities for innovation and tradition at the same time. On the one hand, authors must be careful to remember the important place held by traditional narratives, and on the other hand, they must find ways to present these same stories in a way which is relevant to today's ideas. It's also a matter of cultural responsibility. When applied with an understanding of mythological adaptations origins and meanings, authors can write stories that are respectful of myth and relevant to ongoing discourse. At the end of the day, the amalgamation of mythology with present day themes is stomach for spellbinding and revolutionary storytelling, allowing readers to be aware of the enduring uncultivated classic news while probing the bending of life in the current timestamp. In a world where symbols and traditions are tools of acceptance and resistance, mythology will be a major topic of conversation in the debate in literature, and with it, the way it has a place in the modern narrative and terrains, and how it stands as a way of examining reality and transcendence in the stories we tell, and how we tell them.

## 8. Conclusion

This review has dealt with the complex intermingling of mythology and modernity in the Indian English fiction, tracing out how the present-day Indian authors interweave the legendary narratives to both present a mirror image and also to satirize the modern society. Mythological elements may be incorporated to critically engage deep cultural identities and, through a continuation between the fast-changing globalization and urbanization, provide a feeling of continuity. Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy is typical for this combination – they use myth as a narrative framework which adds to the story and accounts contemporaneous concerns at the same time connecting both Indian and international readers. In addition, this crossroads has an important part in reconstructing national character, enticing perusers to reexamine center qualities with the current changes. Still, making that delicate balancing act between myth and the present day is hard. With all due respect for their roots, these narratives must be presented with cultural sensitivity to avoid pitfalls, and true authors must learn to honor these narratives in such a way that engages the modern; context. Future research into Indian English fiction also exists as this discourse evolves further into lesser-known authors and texts. Further enriching our understanding of the genre is to explore how emerging voices reinterpret mythology. The final dialogue between mythology and modernity nonetheless reflects the complexity of Indian society as well as the timelessness of these stories in the continuing conversations that they engender in the contemporary text.

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