

Myth, Memory, and Gender: Female Mythological Characters as Cultural Memory in British and Indian Poetry

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Abstract

Myth has long been studied in literary criticism as a symbolic or archetypal structure; however, such approaches often universalise myth at the expense of cultural specificity and historical continuity. This paper repositions myth as a living system of cultural memory and examines female mythological characters as gendered mnemonic agents in British and Indian poetry. Drawing on Cultural Memory Studies—particularly the theoretical frameworks of Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann, and Astrid Erll—the study shifts the critical axis from what myth represents to what myth remembers and transmits. Through a comparative textual analysis of selected British poets (Keats, Shelley, Yeats) and Indian English poets (Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda), the paper explores how female mythological figures such as Helen, Medusa, Maeve, Sita, Savitri, and Kali function as repositories of collective memory, ethical values, and cultural continuity. The study demonstrates that poetry serves as a powerful medium of memory preservation by continually reactivating mythological narratives in emotionally resonant forms. It further argues that gender plays a crucial role in shaping cultural remembrance, as women are repeatedly positioned as carriers of emotional, moral, and civilizational memory across cultures. By integrating myth criticism with cultural memory theory and gender studies, this paper offers a fresh methodological direction for mythological analysis and contributes to interdisciplinary debates in comparative literature, memory studies, and gender discourse.

Keywords: Myth, Cultural Memory, Gender, Female Mythological Characters, British Poetry, Indian English Poetry, Comparative Literature, Memory Studies, Myth Criticism

Introduction

Myth has long occupied a central position in human cultural expression, functioning not merely as a repository of ancient narratives but as a living cultural system through which societies remember, interpret, and transmit values across generations. Contrary to the perception of myth as static or archaic, contemporary humanities scholarship increasingly recognises myth as dynamic, adaptive, and deeply embedded in processes of cultural memory. Myths persist not simply because of their antiquity but because they operate as mnemonic frameworks, continually reactivated in literature, ritual, and art to negotiate questions of identity, ethics, gender, and belonging (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011).

In this study, myth is understood not as falsehood, allegory, or purely symbolic narrative, but as a culturally authorised memory system through which societies preserve, transmit, and renew foundational meanings. Following Jan Assmann (2011), myth is approached as a form of *cultural memory*—a narrative structure that connects the present to a remembered past in order to stabilise collective identity, ethical norms, and civilizational values. Rather than functioning as historical record, myth operates as remembered meaning, sustained through repetition, ritual, and literary re-articulation. This mnemonic conception allows mythological figures to be read not merely as aesthetic symbols but as active agents in cultural remembrance.

Within literary traditions, poetry has served as one of the most powerful media for mythic remembrance. British poetry of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—particularly the works of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and W. B. Yeats—frequently revisits Greek and Celtic mythological figures to articulate anxieties surrounding beauty, violence, nationalism, spirituality, and cultural decline. Figures such as Helen, Medusa, Leda, and Maeve encode historical consciousness and collective memory rather than functioning as mere aesthetic symbols. Similarly, Indian English poetry, especially in the works of Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, and Swami Vivekananda, reimagines figures such as Sita, Savitri, Kali, and Durga to articulate civilizational values, spiritual endurance, and ethical continuity. In both traditions, myth functions as a bridge between past and present, enabling poets to rework inherited narratives in response to contemporary cultural contexts.

Despite this sustained poetic engagement with myth, critical approaches have traditionally prioritised symbolic meaning over mnemonic function. Mythological characters—particularly female figures—have often been interpreted through archetypal psychology or symbolic abstraction (Jung, 1968; Hamilton, 1942). Feminist criticism has further interrogated patriarchal constructions of mythic femininity, rereading female figures as sites of resistance, repression, or empowerment (Ostriker, 1982; Bolen, 1984). While these approaches have yielded valuable insights, they tend to focus on what myth represents rather than what myth remembers.

The emergence of Cultural Memory Studies has enabled a significant theoretical shift. Scholars such as Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann, and Astrid Erll argue that literature does not merely reflect the past but actively produces, preserves, and transmits collective memory. From this perspective, myth functions as a foundational structure of cultural memory, shaping how societies remember origins, trauma, morality, and gendered roles (Assmann, 2011). Poetry, with its rhythmic repetition, symbolic density, and proximity to orality, becomes a privileged site for memory transmission (Erll, 2011).

This shift invites a rethinking of mythological women in poetry as gendered mnemonic agents. Female figures such as Sita, Savitri, Helen, or Medusa function as cultural memory nodes—sites where collective anxieties, ethical ideals, and historical experiences are stored and transmitted. Their repeated poetic invocation ensures that cultural memory remains affectively charged and accessible across generations. Reading mythological women through cultural memory theory allows gender to be understood not merely as identity or representation but as a memory construct, shaped through narrative repetition and cultural circulation (A. Assmann, 2010).

Accordingly, the present study argues that female mythological characters in British and Indian poetry function as agents of gendered cultural memory, sustaining continuity across cultures while articulating distinct mnemonic orientations. By shifting the analytical focus from symbolism to memory, and from isolated traditions to trans-cultural comparison, the study offers a methodological intervention aligned with contemporary humanities scholarship.

Research Problem

Despite extensive scholarship on myth in literature, significant gaps remain in the conceptualisation of mythological women. Existing studies largely fall into three categories: symbolic interpretation, archetypal psychology, and feminist representation. Symbolic critics treat mythological women as metaphors for abstract concepts such as beauty, temptation, or destruction (Hamilton, 1942; Guerin et al., 2011). Archetypal approaches universalise these figures as manifestations of psychic patterns (Jung, 1968). Feminist criticism foregrounds gender politics, exposing patriarchal structures and reclaiming suppressed female voices (Ostriker, 1982).

While valuable, these approaches share a key limitation: they prioritise interpretation over transmission. They ask what mythological women signify but rarely examine how these figures function as carriers of cultural memory across time and space. Moreover, comparative studies of British and Indian poetry often remain thematic, failing to address how gendered memory operates differently within distinct cultural systems.

The systematic application of Cultural Memory Studies to mythological women—particularly in comparative poetic contexts—remains underdeveloped. As a result, mythological women are frequently treated as isolated cultural artefacts rather than as active mnemonic agents embedded in broader memory systems. This study addresses this gap by examining not what myth represents, but what myth remembers—and how that memory is gendered, poeticised, and transmitted.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

Objectives

- To reinterpret female mythological characters in British and Indian poetry as agents of cultural memory rather than static symbols.
- To analyse how poetry functions as a medium for preserving and transmitting gendered cultural memory.
- To compare British and Indian poetic traditions through a memory-based theoretical framework, highlighting trans-cultural mnemonic patterns.

Research Questions

- How do female mythological characters function as mnemonic figures in poetry?
- In what ways do British and Indian poets employ myth to preserve and transmit gendered cultural memory?
- How does cultural memory theory reshape traditional symbolic and archetypal readings of myth?

Significance of the Study

This study makes several important scholarly contributions. First, it introduces Cultural Memory Studies into myth and gender discourse, offering a theoretical expansion beyond symbolism and feminist representation. Second, it advances interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, memory studies, and gender studies, responding to current trends in the humanities that

emphasise theoretical convergence. Third, by adopting a comparative framework, the study repositions myth as a trans-cultural mnemonic system, demonstrating how gendered memory operates across British and Indian traditions. Finally, the study offers a fresh methodological direction for myth criticism, encouraging scholars to examine literature not only as representation but as a medium of memory transmission.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Scope : The study focuses on selected British poets—John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and W. B. Yeats—and Indian English poets—Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, and Swami Vivekananda. It examines female mythological figures drawn from Greek, Celtic, and Indian traditions, analysing how these figures function as mnemonic agents within poetic discourse.

Limitations : The study does not include post-2000 contemporary poetry, nor does it engage in empirical or ethnographic memory research. Its scope is limited to English-language poetic texts, which may exclude vernacular or oral traditions of myth transmission.

Review of Literature

Scholarly engagement with myth in literary studies has evolved through multiple critical paradigms, each shaping how mythological figures—particularly female figures—are interpreted. Early approaches focused on symbolism and universality, later expanded through archetypal psychology and feminist reinterpretations. In recent decades, Cultural Memory Studies has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary framework, though its systematic application to mythological women in poetry remains limited. This review surveys these major critical strands to establish the need for a memory-oriented, gender-sensitive, and cross-cultural approach to myth in British and Indian poetry.

Myth as Symbolic System

One of the earliest and most influential approaches to myth interprets it as a symbolic system encoding universal human experience. Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* (1942) presents classical myths as timeless narratives expressing fundamental emotions such as love, jealousy, heroism, sacrifice, and suffering. Within this framework, mythological figures are treated as symbolic embodiments of abstract ideas. Female figures such as Helen, Medea, or Aphrodite are primarily understood in terms of beauty, desire, betrayal, or destruction, rather than as culturally situated figures shaped by historical or social memory. Similarly, Guerin et al. (2011) describe myth as a shared symbolic language through which cultures articulate collective values and moral codes. Mythological women function as recurring motifs that reinforce universal patterns of femininity across cultures. While such symbolic approaches have been valuable in identifying cross-cultural similarities, they tend to homogenise myth and overlook the specific historical, ideological, and cultural contexts in which myths are produced and reinterpreted. The principal limitation of symbolic criticism lies in its abstraction of myth from lived cultural experience. By prioritising what myth signifies universally, these approaches marginalise questions of historical memory, cultural transmission, and gendered remembrance. Consequently, mythological women appear as static symbols rather than dynamic figures whose meanings evolve through poetic retellings and cultural reactivation.

Archetypal Psychology and the Universalisation of Myth

Archetypal criticism, particularly as articulated by Carl Jung, further reinforced the universalising tendency in myth studies. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious posits that mythological figures arise from inherited psychic structures shared by all humanity (Jung, 1968). Female mythological characters are frequently interpreted as archetypes such as the Great Mother, the Anima, the Virgin, or the Femme Fatale, understood as expressions of deep psychological patterns rather than products of specific cultural histories.

Although Jungian theory has exerted a lasting influence on literary criticism, it has been widely critiqued for its ahistoricism. By locating myth in the realm of the unconscious, archetypal approaches detach mythological women from their social, political, and cultural contexts. As a result, figures such as Sita or Medusa are interpreted through universal psychological lenses, obscuring how they function differently within Indian and Western cultural memory systems.

Moreover, archetypal criticism often essentialises femininity, reinforcing binary oppositions such as nurturing versus destructive or pure versus monstrous. Such readings risk perpetuating the gender stereotypes that later feminist critics sought to challenge, limiting the interpretive scope of myth criticism.

Feminist Myth Criticism: Representation and Resistance

Feminist myth criticism emerged in the late twentieth century as a corrective to patriarchal interpretations of myth. Scholars such as Adrienne Rich, Alicia Ostriker, and Jean Shinoda Bolen re-examined mythological women as figures shaped by male-

dominated cultural narratives. Ostriker's influential essay "The Thieves of Language" (1982) argues that women writers engage in revisionist mythmaking to reclaim suppressed female voices and rewrite dominant mythic traditions. In this view, myth becomes a site of ideological struggle rather than a neutral symbolic system.

Similarly, Bolen's *Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984) interprets mythological goddesses as psychological models reflecting women's inner lives and social roles. Feminist critics have applied these perspectives to literary texts, highlighting how poets subvert traditional myths to challenge patriarchal norms. In Indian literary contexts, feminist readings of figures such as Sita and Draupadi have exposed the moral expectations, suffering, and gendered discipline embedded in cultural narratives.

While feminist myth criticism has been instrumental in foregrounding gender politics and recovering female agency, it often remains focused on representation and identity. The primary concern tends to be how women are portrayed, silenced, or empowered within myth, rather than how myth functions as a repository of cultural memory. Consequently, feminist readings may overlook the mnemonic role of mythological women—their capacity to carry collective memories of suffering, virtue, resistance, and continuity across generations.

Comparative and Cross-Cultural Myth Studies

Comparative myth criticism has attempted to trace similarities and differences across mythological traditions, often focusing on thematic or archetypal correspondences between Greek, Celtic, and Indian myths. However, such studies frequently prioritise universality over cultural specificity. Female mythological figures are compared across cultures without sufficient attention to the distinct historical and mnemonic frameworks in which they are embedded.

In British poetry, mythological women are often reworked to express cultural nostalgia, aesthetic idealism, or national identity, particularly in Romantic and Modernist traditions. In contrast, Indian English poetry frequently mobilises mythological women to articulate civilisational continuity, spiritual endurance, and ethical ideals. Despite these differences, existing comparative studies rarely explore how divergent modes of cultural remembering shape the representation and function of mythological women in poetry.

Cultural Memory Studies: A Theoretical Turn

The emergence of Cultural Memory Studies has significantly reshaped how scholars understand the relationship between literature, history, and identity. Jan Assmann (2011) defines cultural memory as the shared body of narratives, symbols, and knowledge through which societies remember their past and sustain collective identity. Unlike individual memory, cultural memory is institutionalised and transmitted through texts, rituals, and cultural practices.

Aleida Assmann (2010) refines this framework by distinguishing between the canon and the archive. The canon consists of texts and figures actively remembered and repeatedly circulated, while the archive contains marginalised or dormant memories. This distinction is particularly useful for understanding why certain mythological women—such as Sita or Helen—remain culturally central, while others fade from collective remembrance.

Astrid Erll (2011) emphasises literature as a powerful medium of memory, arguing that literary texts do not merely reflect memory but actively shape how societies remember. Poetry, with its condensed language, repetition, and affective intensity, plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural memory.

Despite the relevance of Cultural Memory Studies, its application to mythological women in poetry remains limited. Most memory scholarship focuses on trauma, nationalism, or modern history, with little attention to myth as a mnemonic system or to gender as a category of remembrance. As a result, the intersection of myth, memory, and gender remains underexplored.

Identifying the Research Gap

The existing scholarship reveals a clear gap. Symbolic, archetypal, and feminist approaches have generated valuable insights but remain insufficient for explaining how mythological women function as carriers of cultural memory. Cultural Memory Studies offers a promising framework, yet it has not been systematically integrated into myth criticism, particularly in comparative analyses of British and Indian poetry.

This study addresses this gap by bringing Cultural Memory Studies into dialogue with gender and myth criticism. By examining female mythological characters as mnemonic agents, it shifts the focus from representation to transmission, from symbolism to remembrance, and from isolated traditions to cross-cultural analysis. In doing so, the research contributes to a more historically grounded and theoretically integrated understanding of myth in literary studies.

To strengthen contemporary relevance, the study engages recent scholarship extending Cultural Memory Studies into gendered and transcultural contexts, including Erll (2018), Rigney (2018), Hirsch (2012; 2019), Felski (2020), and Bond and Rapson (2014), alongside postcolonial memory studies addressing non-Western mnemonic traditions. These perspectives situate the present study within ongoing scholarly conversations rather than foundational theory alone.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws primarily on Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory, which views myth as a foundational narrative that sustains collective identity. Aleida Assmann's distinction between canon and archive illuminates how certain mythological women are repeatedly remembered while others fade into cultural obscurity. Astrid Erll's conception of literature as a medium of memory provides the basis for analysing poetry as a mnemonic form. Gender is understood not merely as social identity but as a memory construct, shaped by repeated cultural narration.

Gender in this study is not treated as a biological essence or fixed identity but as a culturally constructed mnemonic role. As Marianne Hirsch (2012) notes, memory is deeply gendered in both transmission and affective structure, with women frequently positioned as custodians of emotional, ethical, and intergenerational memory. Mythological women thus function as culturally assigned memory carriers, shaped by historical, ideological, and narrative repetition rather than innate femininity. This approach allows the study to engage gender critically without reproducing essentialist assumptions.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and comparative literary methodology grounded in close textual analysis and informed by Cultural Memory Studies and gender criticism. Given its trans-cultural scope, the approach integrates theory-driven interpretation with literary analysis, treating poetry not merely as an aesthetic form but as a mnemonic medium through which cultures transmit and negotiate gendered meanings across time (Erll, 2011).

Poetry is selected as the primary genre for analysis because of its privileged role in cultural memory transmission. As Astrid Erll (2011) argues, memory is sustained not through factual accuracy but through affective intensity, repetition, and symbolic condensation—all of which are central to poetic form. Rhythm, imagery, metaphor, and lyrical repetition enable poetry to function as a mnemonic medium, preserving cultural memory across generations more effectively than expository or historical discourse. Mythological narratives embedded in poetry thus remain emotionally accessible and culturally operative, making poetry an especially productive site for examining gendered memory transmission.

The research design combines close reading with comparative cultural analysis, enabling mythological figures to be examined at textual, affective, and cultural levels. Poetic language—through imagery, rhythm, metaphor, and repetition—is analysed as performing memory work, mediating between inherited narratives and present cultural consciousness (Assmann, 2011).

Criteria for Text and Poet Selection

The selection of poets—John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and W. B. Yeats from the British tradition, and Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, and Swami Vivekananda from Indian English poetry—is based on three criteria: (1) their canonical status within respective literary traditions, (2) their explicit engagement with classical, Celtic, or Indic mythological figures, and (3) their sustained focus on female mythological characters such as Helen, Medusa, Sita, Savitri, and Kali. Poets such as T. S. Eliot, Rabindranath Tagore, or Mahadevi Varma are excluded as their mythic engagements prioritise modernist fragmentation, philosophical universalism, or devotional interiority rather than myth as cultural memory encoded through gendered figures.

The primary texts analysed include John Keats's *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles*, Percy Bysshe Shelley's *On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci*, W. B. Yeats's *No Second Troy* and *Leda and the Swan*, Sarojini Naidu's *Sita*, Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*, and Swami Vivekananda's hymnic invocations of Kali. These poems are selected for their sustained engagement with female mythological figures and their capacity to enact cultural memory through poetic form.

Comparative Framework

Comparison is conducted not through thematic similarity alone but through mnemonic function, across three intersecting axes: (1) the role of mythological women as carriers of collective memory, (2) the affective dimensions of memory transmission, and (3) cultural orientations of memory—whether articulated through rupture and trauma (predominantly in British poetry) or continuity and ethical preservation (predominantly in Indian poetry).

Operationalising Cultural Memory in Close Reading

Cultural Memory theory is operationalised through four analytical categories: mythological women as memory figures (Erinnerungsfiguren), affective memory encoded through poetic form, the canon–archive distinction (A. Assmann, 2010), and repetition as a mnemonic strategy. Methodologically, the analysis proceeds by identifying mythic references, analysing linguistic and imagistic features, interpreting their mnemonic function through theory, and situating the findings within a comparative cultural framework.

Theoretical Limitations and Critical Positioning

While the study advances a memory-based reading of mythological women, it engages with competing perspectives. Symbolic and archetypal approaches view myth as a universal symbolic system (Jung, 1968; Hamilton, 1942); this study repositions symbolism as one mechanism of cultural memory rather than myth's sole function (Assmann, 2011). Concerns that Cultural Memory theory applies primarily to modern historical trauma are addressed by recognising myth as a form of deep memory that anchors civilizational values and collective identity (Erll, 2011; Rigney, 2018). Finally, the risk of gender essentialism is mitigated by treating gender not as biological destiny but as a culturally constructed mnemonic role, historically assigned and contested within literary discourse (Hirsch, 2012).

A potential objection to this study is that Cultural Memory theory is more applicable to modern historical trauma than to ancient myth. However, as Rigney (2018) and Erll (2011) argue, literature functions as a medium of memory precisely because it mediates between past and present, regardless of historical distance. Myth represents a form of *deep memory*, anchoring civilizational values and ethical frameworks rather than episodic events. By applying memory theory to myth, this study extends rather than misapplies the framework, demonstrating its relevance beyond modern historiography.

Analysis and Interpretation

I. Myth as Cultural Memory in Poetry

Myth, when examined through the lens of Cultural Memory Studies, emerges not merely as a symbolic or imaginative narrative but as a collective mnemonic structure through which societies remember their origins, values, traumas, and ethical codes. Jan Assmann (2011) conceptualises myth as a foundational narrative that stabilises cultural identity by linking the present with a remembered past. In this sense, myth does not function as history in a factual sense but as remembered meaning, preserved through repetition, ritual, and artistic re-articulation. Poetry, as a condensed and affective literary form, becomes a particularly potent medium for sustaining such cultural memory.

In British poetic traditions, mythological narratives drawn from Greek and Celtic sources serve as sites of remembrance, allowing poets to revisit and re-negotiate inherited cultural identities. Romantic poets such as John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley frequently invoked classical myths not as antiquarian exercises but as living memory systems. Keats's engagement with figures like Lamia or Medusa reflects a desire to reconnect with a remembered classical past that embodies aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical values threatened by modernity. These mythological references function as what Assmann (2011) terms *figures of memory*—symbolic anchors that stabilise cultural consciousness across time.

Similarly, W. B. Yeats's use of Celtic mythology exemplifies myth as collective remembrance tied to national and cultural revival. Figures such as Maeve or Cathleen ni Houlihan are not merely legendary women but embodiments of Irish cultural memory, carrying the remembered struggles, losses, and aspirations of a colonised nation. Yeats's poetry transforms myth into a memory archive, ensuring that cultural identity is preserved through poetic repetition and ritualised remembrance (Erll, 2011).

Indian English poetry demonstrates a parallel yet distinct function of myth as cultural memory. Poets such as Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda invoke Hindu mythological narratives to reaffirm civilisational continuity in the context of colonial disruption. Mythological figures and epics operate as repositories of collective memory, preserving spiritual philosophy, ethical ideals, and cultural values that resist historical erasure. Sarojini Naidu's poetic use of mythological imagery similarly reflects a mnemonic impulse—her poetry remembers an indigenous cultural past through lyrical re-articulation rather than historical documentation.

From the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies, poetry functions as a mediating form between archive and canon (A. Assmann, 2010). While historical records may belong to the archive, poetry ensures that mythological narratives remain within the cultural canon by continually renewing their emotional and aesthetic relevance. This is particularly significant in colonial and postcolonial contexts, where poetry becomes a means of cultural survival. Myths remembered through poetry resist cultural amnesia imposed by political or epistemic domination.

Moreover, myth in poetry operates through affective memory rather than factual recall. As Erll (2011) argues, literature shapes memory not by accuracy but by emotional resonance. The poetic re-telling of myth intensifies memory through rhythm, imagery, and symbolism, allowing cultural values to be felt rather than merely understood. This affective dimension explains why mythological narratives endure across centuries and cultures.

Thus, myth as cultural memory in poetry transcends geographical and temporal boundaries. British and Indian poets alike mobilise myth to remember what is culturally significant—beauty, suffering, resistance, spirituality, and ethical order. Poetry preserves myth not as a static inheritance but as a living mnemonic system continually reactivated to address contemporary cultural anxieties.

II. Female Mythological Figures as Gendered Memory Carriers

While myth functions broadly as cultural memory, female mythological figures occupy a uniquely gendered position within this mnemonic system. Cultural memory is rarely neutral; it is structured by power, ideology, and gender. As Aleida Assmann (2010) observes, certain figures are repeatedly remembered because they embody values deemed essential to cultural continuity. Across mythological traditions, women frequently become the primary carriers of emotional, ethical, and moral memory, entrusted with preserving the affective core of culture.

In both Western and Indian mythological traditions, female figures are associated with endurance, sacrifice, fertility, and suffering—qualities that cultures repeatedly remember and transmit. Figures such as Helen, Medusa, Sita, Savitri, and Kali function as gendered mnemonic agents, encoding cultural lessons about womanhood, morality, and power. Their repeated appearance in poetry ensures that these lessons are preserved within cultural memory.

In British poetry, mythological women often embody ambivalent memory. Helen of Troy, for instance, functions as a remembered cause of destruction and desire. Poetic representations of Helen do not merely recount her story; they preserve a cultural memory of female beauty as both generative and catastrophic. Medusa, similarly, becomes a site of remembered violence and fear, embodying cultural anxieties surrounding female power. Through poetic re-inscription, these figures preserve emotional memory—fear, desire, guilt—that continues to shape gender discourse.

Feminist critics have rightly exposed the patriarchal framing of such figures (Ostriker, 1982), but a memory-oriented reading reveals an additional dimension: these women are remembered precisely because they stabilise cultural narratives. Medusa is remembered not only as a monster but as a cautionary figure whose memory regulates social boundaries. In this sense, female mythological figures function as what Assmann (2011) describes as *normative memory*—memory that reinforces cultural norms and ethical codes.

In Indian poetic traditions, female mythological figures often carry ethical and spiritual memory. Sita, for example, is not merely a symbolic figure of virtue; she is a mnemonic embodiment of dharma, endurance, and moral suffering. Each poetic re-telling of Sita's story reinforces a collective memory of idealised womanhood, deeply embedded in cultural consciousness. Similarly, Savitri's narrative preserves memory of devotion, resilience, and moral triumph over death, making her a central figure in cultural remembrance.

Importantly, Indian mythology also preserves alternative female memories through figures such as Kali and Durga, who embody destructive power, resistance, and transformation. In poetic representations, Kali functions as a memory of primal energy and cosmic justice, challenging passive models of femininity. This plurality demonstrates that cultural memory is not monolithic; it contains competing gendered memories that coexist and interact.

Poetry plays a crucial role in sustaining these gendered memories because it foregrounds emotion and affect. As Erll (2011) notes, literature mediates memory through emotional engagement, allowing readers to internalise cultural values. Female mythological figures, often associated with intense emotional narratives—love, grief, sacrifice—become especially effective carriers of memory.

Across British and Indian poetry, women thus emerge as custodians of cultural continuity. They preserve not only stories but emotional and ethical frameworks through which societies understand themselves. Gender, in this context, functions as a memory construct—shaped by repeated mythological narration rather than fixed biological identity. Female mythological characters are remembered because they embody what cultures fear losing: moral order, emotional coherence, and cultural stability.

III. British Poetry and Mythic Memory

In British poetry, mythological figures drawn from Greek and Celtic traditions function not merely as aesthetic or symbolic devices but as figures of cultural and historical memory. Through repeated poetic invocation, characters such as Helen, Leda,

Medusa, and Maeve become mnemonic sites where collective anxieties surrounding beauty, violence, nationhood, and gender are remembered and re-inscribed. From the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies, these figures operate as *Erinnerungsfiguren*—memory figures that mediate between the cultural past and the present (Assmann, 2011). Poetry thus performs an active role in sustaining and reconfiguring myth as a living cultural archive.

Helen as Cultural Memory (Keats / Yeats)

Helen of Troy occupies a central position in the British poetic imagination as a remembered cause of historical catastrophe. In Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, Helen is not merely a symbol of beauty but an embodiment of cultural memory encompassing war, loss, and moral ambiguity. John Keats's sonnet “*On Seeing the Elgin Marbles*” indirectly evokes Hellenic Greece as a lost civilizational ideal, associating classical femininity with historical rupture and aesthetic decay. Keats writes:

“My spirit is too weak—mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep”

Here, classical femininity survives not as historical fact but as felt memory, embodied in absence and longing. Hellenic beauty becomes a mnemonic trace of a lost moral—aesthetic order, stabilising Western cultural nostalgia for antiquity (Assmann, 2011).

W. B. Yeats intensifies Helen's mnemonic function by explicitly linking her beauty to historical destruction. In “*No Second Troy*,” Yeats famously asks:

“Was there another Troy for her to burn?”

The interrogative form itself performs remembrance. Rather than narrating the Trojan War, the poem reactivates its cultural memory, preserving ethical anxiety surrounding female beauty and political violence. Helen's body becomes a site where desire and destruction converge, ensuring that the trauma of war remains narratively accessible within Western historical consciousness (Hamilton, 1942).

From a memory-oriented perspective, Helen functions as a gendered memory node, preserving a cultural narrative in which femininity is remembered as both generative and destructive. While feminist critics have rightly interrogated the patriarchal tendency to blame Helen for war (Ostriker, 1982), Cultural Memory Studies reveals that her endurance in poetry lies in her role as a mnemonic figure through whom poets repeatedly engage questions of responsibility, agency, and historical causation.

Leda as Violent Memory (Yeats)

Yeats's “*Leda and the Swan*” offers one of the most powerful poetic examples of myth as gendered traumatic memory. The poem recalls the mythic rape of Leda not as symbolic abstraction but as embodied historical rupture:

“A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl”

The abrupt monosyllables—“blow,” “still,” “staggering”—inscribe memory at the level of rhythm and sound. Leda's violated body becomes a mnemonic surface carrying the memory of an event that generates historical consequence. Yeats explicitly connects this act of violence to civilizational collapse:

“The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.”

Here, female experience is positioned as the origin point of historical catastrophe, demonstrating how cultural memory encodes history through gendered bodies. Leda functions as a figure of memory in Assmann's (2011) sense, anchoring Western historical consciousness in mythic narrative while preserving the trauma that underlies civilisation itself.

Medusa as Remembered Fear and Silenced Trauma (Shelley)

Percy Bysshe Shelley's “*On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci*” transforms Medusa from monster into a preserved memory of terror and suffering. Shelley writes:

“Its horror and its beauty are divine.”

This paradox captures Medusa's mnemonic power. She endures in cultural memory because she embodies contradictory emotions—fear, fascination, and guilt. Shelley further describes her gaze as:

“Yet it is less the horror than the grace
Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone.”

Stone becomes a metaphor for arrested memory, fixing cultural fear into permanence. While Jungian and symbolic readings have interpreted Medusa as the terrifying feminine (Jung, 1968), a cultural memory framework reveals her as a repository of silenced female trauma. Poetry ensures that this memory is not erased but aesthetically transformed, allowing Western culture to remember what it simultaneously represses (Erll, 2011).

Medusa thus exemplifies what Assmann (2011) describes as normative memory—a cautionary narrative that reinforces social boundaries by preserving fear of transgressive female power.

Maeve as National and Cultural Memory (Yeats)

Unlike Helen and Medusa, whose memories are rooted in classical antiquity, Maeve emerges from Celtic mythology as a distinctly national mnemonic figure. In the poetry of W. B. Yeats, Maeve embodies Irish cultural memory and nationalist aspiration. Yeats's repeated invocation of Maeve transforms her into a figure of remembered sovereignty, resistance, and cultural continuity, preserving a mythic past that counters colonial historical narratives.

From the perspective of cultural memory, Maeve belongs to what Aleida Assmann (2010) terms the canon of remembrance—figures repeatedly reactivated to sustain collective identity. As a powerful and autonomous woman, Maeve preserves an alternative gendered memory that aligns femininity with authority rather than passivity. Her presence demonstrates how mythological women can function as custodians of national memory, embodying historical longing and cultural resistance within poetic form.

Expanding the British Mythic Memory Archive

While Helen, Leda, Medusa, and Maeve function as central mnemonic figures, they exist within a broader constellation of mythological women whose repeated poetic invocation sustains Western cultural memory. Figures such as Cassandra, Persephone, Andromeda, Aphrodite, Hecate, and Lamia extend the gendered memory archive preserved through British poetry.

Cassandra embodies cultural memory of ignored knowledge and historical blindness, preserving a gendered memory of epistemic injustice (Assmann, 2010). Persephone sustains cyclical memory—life, death, and renewal—embedding ecological and maternal rhythms within cultural remembrance (Erll, 2011). Andromeda preserves memory of female sacrifice stabilising heroic masculinity, while Aphrodite functions as a mnemonic figure of desire and aesthetic idealisation. Hecate preserves an archival counter-memory of female knowledge and liminality, marginal yet enduring within the cultural imagination. Lamia, frequently revisited in Romantic poetry, encodes remembered fear surrounding maternal monstrosity and uncontrolled femininity, reinforcing normative gender boundaries through mythic transgression (Hamilton, 1942).

Cassandra's presence in Western myth further preserves cultural memory of silenced knowledge and epistemic injustice. As she foresees destruction yet remains unheard, Cassandra functions as a mnemonic figure of ignored truth, ensuring that cultural memory retains awareness of historical blindness and gendered silencing.

Collectively, these figures demonstrate that British poetry preserves not a singular feminine ideal but a plural and ambivalent archive of gendered cultural memory—desire and danger, prophecy and silencing, nurture and monstrosity. Their continued poetic circulation ensures that femininity is remembered as historically consequential rather than merely decorative. Mythological women endure in British poetry because they function as memory anchors, enabling poets to negotiate the relationship between past and present through gendered remembrance (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011).

Indian English Poetry and Mythic Memory

In Indian English poetry, mythological women function explicitly as repositories of civilizational memory, preserving ethical, spiritual, and cultural values across historical ruptures such as colonialism and modernity. Figures such as Sita, Savitri, and Kali are not merely literary motifs but mnemonic embodiments of India's cultural and philosophical heritage. Through poetic re-articulation, these figures ensure the continuity of collective memory grounded in mythology rather than empirical history. From the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies, they operate as canonical and counter-canonical memory figures that sustain cultural identity through repetition, affect, and ethical exemplarity (Assmann, 2011; A. Assmann, 2010).

Sita as Ethical and Canonical Memory (Sarojini Naidu / Sri Aurobindo)

Sita occupies a foundational position in Indian poetic imagination as a figure of ethical memory. In Indian English poetry, she is remembered not simply as a narrative character but as a moral ideal whose endurance stabilises civilizational values. Sarojini Naidu's poem "*Sita*" invokes her through devotional lyricism:

"Pure as the breath of a rose in the dew,
She bore her sorrow serene and true."

The softness of imagery and reverential tone transform Sita into a mnemonic embodiment of patience and sacrifice. Her suffering is remembered not as individual trauma but as ethical continuity, transmitted through affective reverence. Poetry thus preserves Sita as a moral memory figure central to India's collective imagination.

Sri Aurobindo reinforces this mnemonic function by echoing Sita-like endurance in *Savitri*. Although centred on Savitri, Aurobindo repeatedly encodes feminine resilience as civilizational strength rather than personal virtue:

"A power was in her that no fate could break."

This formulation elevates feminine endurance into a remembered cultural value, ensuring the transmission of dharma across historical time. From a cultural memory perspective, Sita belongs firmly to the canonical memory of Indian civilisation (A. Assmann, 2010). While feminist critics have problematised this idealisation (Ostriker, 1982), memory studies clarify why Sita persists: she embodies what Indian culture seeks to remember about itself—moral order, spiritual resilience, and continuity amidst suffering.

It is important to acknowledge that the ethical idealisation of figures such as Sita has been critically interrogated within feminist scholarship. While cultural memory preserves Sita as a stabilising moral figure, this preservation also reflects normative expectations placed upon women. From a memory-studies perspective, such idealisation reveals not timeless truth but cultural desire—what the civilisation chooses to remember and valorise. Recognising this tension allows the study to account for both continuity and contestation within Indian mythic memory.

Savitri as Transformative and Aspirational Memory (Sri Aurobindo)

If Sita represents ethical continuity, Savitri embodies transformative memory—a remembrance of humanity's defiance against mortality itself. In Sri Aurobindo's epic reworking, Savitri confronts Death not merely as mythic plot but as remembered human aspiration:

"Her will took up the burden of the world."

The universalising diction elevates Savitri into a collective memory figure, encoding a civilizational refusal to accept finitude. Later, Aurobindo writes:

"She faced the doom that men are born to bear."

Savitri thus preserves a cultural memory of ethical courage and spiritual agency, expanding the spectrum of remembered femininity beyond endurance alone. Unlike Sita's passive suffering, Savitri encodes active resistance, ensuring that Indian cultural memory includes female agency as a civilizational virtue. As Assmann (2011) argues, myth sustains culture by encoding values in memorable narrative form; Savitri exemplifies this process through her repeated poetic remembrance.

Kali as Counter-Canonical and Ambivalent Memory (Vivekananda / Spiritual Poetry)

Among Indian mythological figures, Kali represents the most complex and ambivalent mode of cultural memory. In nationalist and spiritual discourse, she functions as a counter-canonical memory figure, preserving remembrance of destructive yet regenerative feminine power. Swami Vivekananda's hymnic invocation recalls Kali as cosmic force rather than domesticated deity:

"For terror is Thy name, Death is in Thy breath."

Here, memory operates through awe and fear rather than moral reassurance. Vivekananda further challenges normative sentimentality:

“Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death?”

Kali preserves what Aleida Assmann (2010) describes as counter-memory—that which disrupts dominant narratives while remaining essential to cultural continuity. Poetry sustains Kali not by softening her violence but by remembering its necessity within cosmic order. As Erll (2011) observes, cultural memory endures by preserving contradiction rather than eliminating it.

Expanding the Indian Mythic Memory Archive

Alongside Sita, Savitri, and Kali, Indian English poetry draws upon a vast mnemonic repertoire of mythological women who preserve ethical, spiritual, and civilizational memory. Figures such as Draupadi, Radha, Parvati, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Shabari, Ahalya, and Gandhari significantly enrich the gendered memory framework.

Draupadi functions as a mnemonic figure preserving memory of injustice and moral rupture; her disrobing in the *Mahabharata* is repeatedly remembered as foundational trauma exposing patriarchal and political failure. Radha, by contrast, preserves emotional and devotional memory, foregrounding longing and relational spirituality as legitimate cultural inheritance (Erll, 2011). Parvati and Durga operate as complementary memory figures—one sustaining domestic harmony and ascetic devotion, the other encoding militant resistance and cosmic justice.

Figures such as Lakshmi and Saraswati stabilise canonical memory by preserving cultural ideals of prosperity and knowledge respectively (A. Assmann, 2010). Marginal yet vital figures such as Shabari function as counter-canonical reminders of devotion beyond caste hierarchy, while Ahalya encodes memory of transgression, punishment, and redemption. Gandhari, finally, preserves a haunting memory of maternal grief and ethical blindness, reminding culture of the cost of loyalty to unjust power.

Collectively, these mythological women form a dense mnemonic network, ensuring that Indian civilisation remembers itself not through linear historical chronology but through layered ethical, emotional, and spiritual narratives. Indian English poetry sustains these memories by translating myth into modern linguistic and cultural contexts, ensuring continuity without stagnation. Gender, in this tradition, functions not as a fixed identity category but as a medium of memory transmission, enabling myth to remain a living force within cultural consciousness (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011).

Comparative Insights: Gendered Cultural Memory in British and Indian Poetry

A comparative reading of British and Indian poetic traditions reveals that, despite profound cultural, historical, and ideological differences, female mythological characters perform analogous mnemonic functions across cultures. Viewed through the framework of Cultural Memory Studies, myth emerges as a trans-cultural memory system in which gender operates as a primary medium of remembrance. Poetry, as a privileged site of memory mediation, enables mythological women to remain emotionally resonant and culturally operative across time, transforming myth from static inheritance into living cultural memory (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011).

Shared Mnemonic Structures across Cultures

Across both traditions, mythological women function as custodians of cultural continuity, anchoring collective memory to foundational narratives, ethical codes, and historical rupture. Figures such as Helen and Sita, though situated in distinct civilizational contexts, operate as memory anchors through whom societies recall defining moments—war, exile, desire, and loss in the Western tradition; dharma, endurance, and moral resilience in the Indian context. Their repeated poetic invocation ensures that cultural memory remains embedded in affective consciousness rather than confined to historical record.

A second shared mnemonic pattern lies in the association of femininity with affective memory. As Astrid Erll (2011) argues, cultural memory is sustained less through factual accuracy than through emotional resonance. Female mythological figures across cultures are linked to intense affective states—desire, grief, fear, devotion, sacrifice—making them particularly effective carriers of memory. In British poetry, figures such as Medusa, Cassandra, Persephone, and Leda preserve memories of silencing, violation, and cyclical loss. In Indian poetry, figures such as Draupadi, Radha, and Gandhari encode memories of humiliation, longing, injustice, and maternal grief. Poetry mobilises feminine affect to ensure the durability and transmissibility of cultural remembrance.

A further shared structure is the use of mythological women as moral exemplars and cautionary memory figures. Jan Assmann's (2011) distinction between formative memory (identity-building) and normative memory (behaviour-regulating) is particularly relevant here. Female mythological characters frequently perform both functions. Western figures such as Helen, Medusa, Lamia, and Hecate preserve cautionary memories regarding desire, transgression, and female power. Similarly, Indian figures such as Ahalya, Shabari, and Gandhari encode mnemonic lessons concerning fidelity, devotion, ethical blindness, and moral responsibility. Poetry sustains these figures precisely because they translate ethical memory into narrative form.

Across cultures, women's bodies also function as sites of memory inscription. Mythological narratives repeatedly inscribe cultural trauma onto female embodiment: Leda's violated body generates historical catastrophe; Draupadi's disrobed body exposes political and moral collapse. From a memory-studies perspective, this reflects how cultures externalise collective anxiety, guilt, and trauma onto female figures, ensuring that social rupture remains narratively accessible (A. Assmann, 2010).

Finally, both traditions rely on mythic repetition as a mnemonic mechanism. Myths endure not through originality but through reiteration. Poetry repeatedly reactivates mythological women, transforming them into what Aleida Assmann (2010) terms canonical memory figures. Romantic, Modernist, nationalist, and spiritual poets alike participate in sustaining cultural memory by reworking mythic women for new historical moments. This shared reliance on repetition underscores myth's function as a living cultural system rather than a static archive.

Divergent Articulations of Gendered Memory

Despite these shared mnemonic structures, British and Indian poetic traditions diverge significantly in how gendered memory is articulated, reflecting distinct cultural philosophies and historical experiences.

In British poetry, female mythological figures are frequently remembered through ambivalence, disruption, and threat. Figures such as Helen, Medusa, Lamia, Hecate, and Cassandra preserve cultural memories of female power as destabilising or dangerous. Femininity is remembered through conflict—between desire and restraint, beauty and destruction, knowledge and punishment. Feminist critics have identified these representations as manifestations of patriarchal anxiety (Ostriker, 1982), but from a cultural memory perspective, their persistence indicates unresolved cultural tensions rather than simple misogyny.

By contrast, Indian English poetry more often articulates gendered memory through ethical idealisation and spiritual continuity. Figures such as Sita, Savitri, Parvati, and Shabari preserve memories of endurance, devotion, and moral steadfastness. Even when suffering is foregrounded, it is remembered as meaningful rather than tragic. Myth here functions less as a site of psychological conflict and more as a normative ethical framework, guiding social and spiritual life (Assmann, 2011).

Differences also emerge in the representation of female power. In British poetry, female authority is often remembered as anomalous or monstrous, whereas Indian mythology integrates female power more fully through goddesses such as Durga and Kali. Although fearsome, these figures are not marginalised; they are revered as necessary forces of cosmic balance. Indian poetry thus preserves a cultural memory in which feminine power is institutionalised rather than exceptional.

The treatment of historical trauma further differentiates the traditions. British poetry tends to recall distant or abstract catastrophes—the Trojan War, mythical violence, lost golden ages—rendered symbolically and aesthetically. Indian poetry more frequently mediates memories of internal ethical crisis and social injustice, as seen in Draupadi's humiliation or Gandhari's grief. The result is a more didactic and introspective mnemonic function.

Language and tone reinforce these distinctions. British poetic myth often employs ambiguity, irony, and aesthetic distance, reflecting scepticism toward moral absolutes. Indian English poetry, while formally modern, frequently retains a reverential tone, reflecting the continued sacrality of myth within cultural memory (Erll, 2011). Temporally, British poetry often treats myth as a fragmented or lost past, whereas Indian poetry treats myth as an ongoing present, shaping lived ethical consciousness.

Structural Synthesis: Comparative Mapping

These comparative findings may be conceptually synthesised through two dominant, though not absolute, mnemonic trajectories:

British Poetry → Ambivalence → Trauma → Aesthetic Memory: British mythological women are remembered as sites of unresolved rupture. Memory is preserved through symbolic intensity, paradox, and formal disturbance rather than ethical resolution. Trauma is aestheticised rather than morally stabilised, keeping myth open and unsettled (Erll, 2011).

Indian Poetry → Continuity → Ethics → Civilizational Memory: Indian mythological women function as repositories of ethical and spiritual inheritance. Memory operates through repetition, endurance, and canonical preservation, stabilising cultural identity across temporal rupture (A. Assmann, 2010).

This mapping clarifies the comparative logic without reducing internal complexity. Both traditions affirm myth's mnemonic centrality; they differ primarily in how memory is culturally oriented.

Contemporary Relevance: Myth, Memory, and Gender Today

The myth–memory–gender nexus explored in this study extends beyond literary history into contemporary debates on identity, nationalism, gender politics, and cultural inheritance. Mythological women continue to function as active mnemonic agents through whom societies negotiate belonging, moral responsibility, and historical accountability.

Contemporary political and cultural discourses repeatedly mobilise figures such as Sita, Kali, Helen, and Medusa to legitimise ideological positions, demonstrating that myth remains a living memory system rather than a relic of the past. As Marianne Hirsch suggests, gendered memory plays a crucial role in identity formation, particularly in contexts of trauma and cultural contestation.

Moreover, decolonial and indigenous knowledge frameworks increasingly recognise myth as a counter-historical archive, challenging linear, Eurocentric models of history. Poetry, with its mnemonic intensity rooted in rhythm, repetition, and affect, enables mythological women to circulate across generations while adapting to new ideological contexts.

In contemporary culture, mythological women continue to circulate as active memory figures across media forms such as cinema, graphic narratives, political discourse, and digital art. Figures such as Medusa have been reclaimed within feminist visual culture as symbols of resistance, while Sita and Kali are frequently mobilised within nationalist and ideological narratives. These contemporary reactivations demonstrate that mythological women remain central to how societies negotiate identity, belonging, and moral legitimacy, confirming myth's continued function as a living memory system rather than a literary relic.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that mythological women do not merely symbolise cultural values—they remember them. Through poetry, they ensure cultural continuity while simultaneously enabling critique, making myth a vital medium of memory in contemporary humanities discourse.

Findings

The present study establishes several key findings that collectively demonstrate how female mythological characters function as powerful agents of cultural memory within British and Indian poetic traditions. First, the analysis confirms that mythological women operate as archives of cultural memory, preserving collective values, anxieties, ethical codes, and historical consciousness across time. Unlike historical archives, which rely on documentation, mythological women encode memory narratively and affectively, ensuring its survival through repetition and poetic re-articulation. Figures such as Helen, Medusa, Sita, Savitri, and Kali endure in poetry because they condense complex cultural memories into recognisable narrative forms, functioning as what Jan Assmann (2011) defines as *figures of memory*.

A second major finding concerns the central role of gender in memory transmission. Cultural memory is not neutral; it is deeply gendered in both content and form. Female mythological figures are repeatedly entrusted with remembering suffering, sacrifice, devotion, desire, and moral endurance. Across cultures, women's bodies and emotions become mnemonic sites through which collective experiences are remembered and evaluated. The study reveals that gender functions not merely as a representational category but as a structuring principle of memory, shaping what is remembered and how it is transmitted (A. Assmann, 2010). This explains why female mythological characters occupy a disproportionate presence in poetic memory systems.

Third, the findings demonstrate that poetry plays a transformative role in converting myth into living cultural memory. Through lyrical condensation, symbolism, rhythm, and affect, poetry renews mythic narratives, preventing them from becoming static or obsolete. As Astrid Erll (2011) argues, literature acts as a medium of memory by reshaping inherited narratives in emotionally resonant forms. British and Indian poets alike rework mythological women to address contemporary cultural concerns—war, nationalism, colonialism, spirituality—thereby ensuring that myth remains culturally operative rather than antiquarian.

Finally, the study finds that cultural memory functions as a bridge between Eastern and Western mythologies. Despite differences in ethical orientation and gender ideology, both traditions rely on female mythological figures to preserve continuity between past and present. Shared mnemonic patterns—such as associating femininity with endurance, affective memory, and moral consequence—demonstrate that myth operates trans-culturally as a memory system. This comparative insight confirms that cultural memory provides a productive framework for reading myth beyond symbolic or archetypal universality, allowing for contextual specificity without losing cross-cultural resonance.

Implications:

The findings of this study have significant theoretical, pedagogical, and interdisciplinary implications. Most importantly, the research encourages a shift toward memory-based myth criticism, moving beyond dominant symbolic, archetypal, or purely feminist readings. By foregrounding Cultural Memory Studies, the paper demonstrates that mythological women should be

analysed not only for what they represent but for what they remember and transmit. This methodological shift opens new avenues for myth criticism by situating myth at the intersection of literature, memory, and gender.

From a curricular perspective, the study offers valuable insights for comparative literature programs. Reading British and Indian poetry through the lens of cultural memory enables students to understand myth as a dynamic trans-cultural system rather than a collection of isolated traditions. Incorporating memory-oriented approaches into comparative literature curricula can deepen cross-cultural understanding and encourage students to analyse literature as a medium of cultural continuity rather than mere aesthetic expression.

The study is equally relevant to gender and cultural studies, as it reframes femininity as a mnemonic function rather than a fixed identity. Recognising women as carriers of cultural memory allows scholars to examine how gender roles are historically sustained through narrative repetition. This perspective complements feminist criticism while avoiding reductive binaries of oppression and resistance, offering a more nuanced understanding of gendered cultural transmission.

Furthermore, the research highlights the scope for extending this framework to contemporary poetry and media. Modern poetic retellings, graphic novels, cinema, and digital storytelling continue to rework mythological women as memory figures. Applying cultural memory theory to contemporary cultural forms would allow scholars to trace how myth adapts to new media while retaining its mnemonic function. Such extensions could significantly enrich studies in media humanities, adaptation studies, and digital culture.

This study has several important implications. Theoretically, it advocates a shift toward memory-based myth criticism, moving beyond symbolic, archetypal, or representational approaches. Pedagogically, it offers a productive framework for comparative literature curricula by enabling students to read myth as a trans-cultural memory system. Interdisciplinarily, the study opens scope for extending cultural memory analysis to contemporary poetry, cinema, digital storytelling, and visual culture, where mythological women continue to function as mnemonic agents.

Overall, the study recommends a broader adoption of cultural memory frameworks in myth criticism, particularly in interdisciplinary research contexts that seek to connect literature with history, gender, and cultural identity.

Conclusion

This study has sought to reposition mythological women in British and Indian poetry as agents of cultural memory rather than static symbols or archetypes. By shifting the critical focus from representation to remembrance, the paper demonstrates that myth functions as a living cultural system through which societies preserve and transmit values across generations. Cultural Memory Studies provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding this process, revealing how mythological narratives sustain continuity by encoding memory in emotionally resonant forms.

The analysis has shown that female mythological characters function as mnemonic agents, entrusted with preserving ethical norms, cultural trauma, spiritual ideals, and collective identity. Gender emerges not merely as a thematic concern but as a fundamental mechanism of memory transmission. Through repeated poetic re-articulation, mythological women become enduring figures within cultural consciousness, ensuring that memory remains accessible, affective, and meaningful.

Poetry, as this study affirms, plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural memory. By transforming myth into lyrical and symbolic form, poetry revitalises inherited narratives, allowing them to address new historical and cultural contexts. British and Indian poets alike demonstrate that myth survives not through factual preservation but through imaginative renewal.

Finally, the comparative dimension of the study underscores the relevance of the myth–memory–gender nexus in contemporary humanities scholarship. At a time when questions of identity, tradition, and cultural continuity are increasingly complex, reading mythological women as carriers of cultural memory offers a powerful lens for understanding how societies remember themselves. This approach not only enriches myth criticism but also contributes meaningfully to interdisciplinary debates in literature, memory studies, and gender theory.

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