Chapter One:

Introduction: Definition of Myth and Myth in Indian Fiction in English

Literature has always shown profound interest and fascination for mythology. From epics, to poetry, to novels, myths have pervaded every genre transgressing the boundaries of age, culture and language. Indian literature is no exception as it feeds the ardent desire of Indians to be enriched by myths, mythology, legends and folklore. From times immemorial, mythology with its thrilling twists, villainous evil acts, the final victory of goodness over evil along with its freed kingdoms, has been a perpetual source of inspiration to Indian writers. Despite the antiquity, Indian mythology continues to indelibly impress upon Indian writers in their choice of subjects, themes and plots.

Definitions of Myth

An in-depth analysis of how myth has been defined variedly is essential for a better understanding of the intricate relationship between myth and literature. Myths have been studied and explored, interpreted, and defined in various ways from time to time by critics and philosophers in political, social and cultural contexts. In his *The Texture of Culture* (2012), Aleksei Semenenko mentions that the beauty of myths lies in the fact that they do not "belong exclusively to the past and archaic cultures but constitutes an intrinsic part of modern culture as well" (40). The definition of myth in contemporary times has become very vague, loose and broad as myth operates universally and diversely.

Myths evade fix definitions and are beyond orderly classification because of the obscurity of its origin and ambiguity of its meaning. Myths are practically beyond analysis and scrutiny because of their diversity. A. Joseph Dorairaj in *Myth and Literature* (2003) states,

> Myths are uncanny phenomena. They are at once regional and yet universal; static and yet dynamic; stable and yet protean; archaic and yet contemporary; profligate and yet hallowed; fantastic and yet highly – structured; divine and yet human in that they are as much about gods and goddesses as about human beings. Though they belong to a pre-literate and pre-historical era, they keep recurring in all ages and are a part of our contemporary society. Though they belong to the realm of primitive religion and come under the purview of anthropologist, folklorists, and phenomenologist of religion, they are an integral part of literature and other arts. (09)

David Mikics in *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (2007) summarises French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' idea of myth. According to him, Lévi-Strauss considers myths as the building blocks or governing thought structures of collective human existence. He argues that myths are based on oppositions i.e. cultivated versus primitive and human versus divine. Myths are natural as they explain things based on certain discourse of nature. They are cultural as they have particular structure. (195)

Eric Gould in his work *Mythical Intentions in Modern Indian Literature* (1981) defines Myth as both an "allegory and tautology, reason and unreason, logic and fantasy, waking thought and dream, atavism and the perennial, archetype and metaphor, origin and end" (05). Myths have the capacity to bridge these binaries.

Myths can be defined as set of tales, stories believed to have happened and having universal significance that compel compliance with certain codes, rules, rituals, social behaviour, morality and faith in a particular community or culture. For Malinowski in his *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (2011), myths are 'indispensable ingredient' of all cultures, which are continually modified and renewed by the modifications of history. He says,

> Myth… is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative insurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myths fulfil in primitive culture an indispensable function: It expresses, enhances, and codifies belief: it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of rituals and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization. It is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom… These stories… are to the natives a statement of primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions as well as with indications as to how to perform them. (18-19)

From ancient Greece to contemporary times, myth is usually associated with fiction or fictional stories which include the gods, deities or supernatural forces that are beyond our understanding. Sometimes myths are considered as an indispensable aspect of religion. Don Cupitt states in his book *The World to Come* (1981),

We may say that a myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance which is recounted in certain community and is often linked with a ritual; that it tells the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historical time in primal or eschatological time or in the supernatural world, or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history; that the superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic ways, although their powers are more than human and often the story is not naturalistic but has the fractured, disorderly logic of dreams; that the whole body of a people's mythology is often prolix, extravagant and full of seeming inconsistencies; and finally that the work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or to legitimate. (29)

In the research paper entitled "Myth and Contemporary Maithili Literature", (2010) Ratneshwar Mishra states that "myth corresponds neither to religion nor to science. It, rather, comforts both heart and mind and coalesces the gap between intellect and emotions, fact and ideal, the human and non-human" (38). Usually the narrative aspect of the term 'myth' is emphasised in all generalised definitions. Myths are considered as true narratives. William Bascom, in his essay "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives" (1984), mentions,

Myths are prose narratives which are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith, usually sacred, often associated with theology and ritual, and the embodiments of dogma. Their main characters are not usually human beings, but they often have human attributes; they are animals, deities or cultural heroes whose actions are set in

an earlier world. Myths account for the origin of the world, of mankind, of death or for characteristics of birds, animals, geographical features and phenomena of nature. They may recount the activities of the deities, their victories and defeats. They may purport to explain details of ceremonial paraphernalia or rituals. (12)

William Righter in his book *Myth and Literature* (1975) quotes Warren and Wellek, "Myth is narrative, irrational … story-telling of origins and destinies, the explanations… of why the world is and why we do what we do" (05). Apart from its narrative characteristics, myths have special role to play in defining individual's existence in relation with the society and culture. It is said that myths are connected with our mind, our social living, and our past, and bound with human creativity that includes art and literature. General belief of the connection of myths to our mind, our past, social existence and creativity validates Mark Schorer's statement from *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (1959),

Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all opinions and attitudes depend. Myth is the essential substructure of all human activity. (27)

Schorer mentions in his essay, "The Necessity of Myth" (1959), "Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. Myth is large controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life" (360). Schorer emphasises on the organizing value of myth for experience. He considers mythology as an articulated body of such images, a pantheon.

In *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969), Levi-Strauss claims that "it is not men who think in terms of myth but it is myth that operates in men's minds without their being aware of the fact" (12). Elaborating on the correlation between myth and ideology and on the evolutionary nature of myth in our contemporary societies, Claude Lévi-Strauss in his *The Structural Study of Myth* (1955) says,

> What gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described as timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics. (430)

Roland Barthes in his path-breaking book *Mythologies* (1972) uses the word myth as an expression of a historically specific ideological vision of the world. He sees myths as the ideological forms that organize and direct social life. According to him, things are expressed in the duration of time. Instead of disappearing, objects and things sometimes attain the status of myth. While talking about myth as a type of speech he says that myth is a system of communication and everything can be myth, provided it is conveyed by a discourse in which myth utters its message. Everything can be myth.

According to Barthes, mythology transforms culture into nature in terms of ideologies. Myth, a thoroughly ideological process, works by presenting culturally specific objects and relations as if they were timeless, natural, and thus unquestionable. It is this characteristic – duplicity of myth which represents itself as universal and natural, that characterizes its ideological function. Demystification of myth reveals many delusions and tricks that superficially make up national and social culture. Ancient or not, mythology can only have a historical foundation, for myth is a type of

speech chosen by history. History chooses myth to validate certain unacceptable political ideas ideologically as myth is unquestionable.

Peter Calvocoressi emphasises that the functionality of myths is to justify a particular view of particular society (cited by Satchidanandan in *Myth in Contemporary Indian Literature*, 20) whereas Barthes focuses on its naturalising function. He studies myth as a vehicle for perpetuating ideological schemes and exercising power.

> Myth does not deny things, its function on the contrary is to speak of them; quite simply it purifies them and makes them innocent, fixes them in nature and eternity, give them a clarity which is not of explanation but of statement… it abolishes the complexity of human nature; gives it eternal simplicity. (*Mythologies*, 143)

Aleksei Semenenko mentions in his *The Texture of Culture: An Introduction to Yuri Lotman's Semiotic Theory* (2012) "Any text may in principle serve the mythological function if it is interpreted as the model of reality" (p-40) when the culture is considered as a very complex text. He quotes Lotman, certain "text in culture that functions not as source of information but as a catalyst of memory that provokes auto-communication" (40). Myth can be seen as one of the text that can provide modality of the culture. They make us think about ourselves and they are designed to organise the world; hence, connected with personal semiotic space. Lotman says in his *Universe of the Mind* (1990), "Myth always says something about me" (153). They preserve certain model of universe, certain world view, hence; represent type of specific consciousness. We turn to myth again and again as we look at them as a certain cultural entity, a mini-culture. Favourite texts constitute the essence of our cultural self

and auto-communication serves as mechanism (text within the text- discourse within) to transform the self into something desirable.

Levi-Strauss also compares myth to language. He writes, "myth is a language and it is part of human speech… It is both the same thing as language and also something different from it" (*The Structural Study of Myth*, 430). His scientific treatment to myth reveals underlying structures inlaid in them and at the same time highlight the working of human mind as well. In this perspective, myths are supposed to have various variants like langue and parole and many more; hence, structural analysis. On the analogy of morphemes and phonemes Levi-Strauss comes up with mythemes that belongs to higher and more complex order. Like language, mythemes cannot have meaning in themselves, the meaning relies on inter-relation of these mythemes-combination of them. Kirk interprets that Strauss insists that myths are 'speculative or problem reflective'. Proper understanding requires concentration on underlying structure of relationships, rather than an overt content, or any narrow allegorical interpretation. (*Myth,* 07)

In the essay, "Myth Today" (1972), Barthes considers myth as a type of speech - a second order semiological system of communication that is a special preconditioned form of language with a message (*Mythologies*, 107). Myth has double function. It points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us (*Mythologies*, 115).

In his *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (1963), Frye defines literature as 'displaced (*conscious*) mythology' (01) and further adds that "literature creates an autonomous world that gives us an imaginative perspective on the real one" (Mikics, 195). As Frye considers myth as an ultimate source of storytelling, Novel as

a narrative form gives us an opportunity to access deep buried conflict within history. Cecil Foster quotes Frye in *Blackness and Modernity* (2007) "An ideology is a secondary and derivative structure, and that what human society do first make up stories… in other words… an ideology always derives from mythology" (114-115).

The plot or narrative arises eventually from the metaphorical poetic speech in which myth is represented. In this light, contemporary mythological novels become much similar to "Aristotle's mythos, narrative or plot, the moving formal cause which is what Aristotle called the 'soul' of the work and assimilate all details in the realising of its unity" (Frye, *Literature as Context: Milton's Lycidas*,440).

Drawing a comparison between myths and folktales, Northrop Frye in "Myth, Fiction and Displacement" (1961)*,* defines myth as serious, real and significant in explicating important characteristics of life.

> Myths, as compared with folktales, are usually in a special category of seriousness: they are believed to have 'really happened', or to have some exceptional significance in explaining certain features of life, such as ritual. Again, whereas folktales simply interchange motifs and develop variants, myth shows an odd tendency to stick together and build up bigger structures. We have creation myths, fall and flood myths, metamorphosis and dying-god myths, divine-marriage and hero-ancestry myths, etiological myths, apocalyptic myths. (598)

Thus, there are myriad ways of looking at myth. Herder treats myth as allegories whereas Max Muller considers myth as linguistic disease. Existentialists like Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Heidegger associate myth with basic questions of being, encompassing and nothingness. For structuralists like Propp, Levi-Strauss, Todorov

and Kristeva, myth is a 'subconscious language' made up of countless system of signs and they offer the poetics of mythic form. Post structuralist like Derrida looks at the institutionalisation of the mythic discourse as a linguistic phenomena (Satchidanandan, xii). The term has wider implications- from superstitions widely believed and a lie widely accepted to Levi-Strauss' totem being natural and cultural to Barthesian semiotic constructions of ideology to Jamesonian manifestation of latent meaning in the political unconscious.

Myth and Literature

Myth though considered as literature at one point, have larger implications in the contemporary times. It is continuously being replaced by history – as stories that really happened. Even then, myths continue to define and shape literature prominently. Being an integral part of literature, a myth may be retold, elaborated or discovered with new patterns. It remains an important domain of literature in all cultures. Myths were inherently literary in structure. "Mythology as a total structure, defining as it does, a society's religious beliefs, historical traditions, cosmological speculations in short, the whole range of its verbal expressiveness – is the matrix of literature" (Frye, *Myth, Fiction and Displacement*, 600).

Mythology has never been far away from India and Indians. The widespread acceptability of Indian mythology has led it to be the source of a wide range of subjects, themes, plots in the narratives. Irrespective of belonging to the contemporary age or being placed in erstwhile era, Indian mythology has rested its permanent influence on Indian literature as a whole. Indian fiction in English, in one or the other way tries to textualise living myths by creating different literary traditions. It allows to explore its interiors and deep rooted existence to comprehend the linkages among myths,

archetypes and the development of new sensibilities. R Balachandran, in his article, "The Ahalya Myth in Contemporary Tamil Poetry" (2010), mentions,

> One of the significant facts about myth is that myths are texts - a configuration of finite signs that engender infinite interpretations and the remarkable aspect about Indian myths is that they are known to the community even when they are not read… To state the truth, this is the true meaning of a myth, that which circulates among the community even when unread, thereby living in the consciousness of the community… For the creatively inclined, myth opens the fountain-heads of spring, welling up new meanings, lending themselves easily to new interpretations to suit contemporary life that surrounds the different periods. Creative artists watch the emission that issue from mythical texts, and when they figure out new meanings in the events, dilemmas and situations found in the mythical texts, the mythical text becomes a transmitter of new emissions. (108-109)

Myths have been used as a significant tool to expose some crucial debates of contemporary India. Issues of the present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past, giving new meanings and insights reinforcing the theme. Or to put it the other way, myth gets modified and finds the way to be expressed with various mediations to uncover the present world problems. Through myths, authors have found a new way to express and discuss multiple issues like casteism, poverty, men-women relationship, economic inequalities, social injustice, sublime and ecstatic extinction of cultural rituals, the problematics of non-secularism, scientific horrors, politics, diseases, communal riots, various movements, extinction of cultural heritage, freedom

movement etc. S. Anandh Raj in his *Multi-Visions in English Language and Literature* (2016) states,

> Issues of present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an integral part of the culture consciousness of the land, with their associative layers of meaning, their timelessness and relevance to contemporary issues. (52)

M Leelavati mentions in her article, "Mythical Concepts in Contemporary Malayalam Poetry" (2010), "The way mythical elements are employed in artistic creations and literary works varies with time, contemporary situations and the individual psychic structure" (84). The interesting aspect of the stories from Indian mythology is that they are usually meant to convey subtle facts, rules and maxims to guide our daily lives. Symbolic/implicit and explicit references to mythology is the key factor that draws readers of all ages to contemporary Indian literature. The inclusion of myths in casual reading is to serve the purpose of inculcating interest in Indian culture and to impart Indian values in the younger generation especially of the elite class.

When the social ethos are re-evaluated with the tools like decanonisation or re-reading, a new meaning is attained through interpretations. Mythical characters supplemented and complemented by attaining new voices. Myth narratives embody reality, wrapping of contemporary problems of society, present contemporary history in a newer way, shattering the old cultural hegemony. The writers seek new ways to re-motivate history with the use of myth. The kaleidoscopic range of these voices equip the silenced, marginalized, ignored communities with new voices.

Myths are hardly accepted in their original form. They are always interpreted and reinterpreted, codified and modified to become acceptable. They are always powerful tools to manage society and have helped naturalise social orders. They are used equally powerfully by radical elements. The metaphors and narratives are replete with reflections of the social structure and class dominance in Indian society through ages. The Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads with their innumerable plots and characters have continued to be the fountain-head for innumerable literary works. Their capacity to expose social problems and cultural concerns make them very vital to the India.

Myths are reservoirs of new meanings… Myths when employed by modern writers acquire a new lease of life. The contemporary literature, hence, continues to dig into the world of past experiences so as to surmount present complexities. This can be one of the reason for mythopoetic vision of the contemporary writers. (Balachandran, 115)

Most of the time, a situation or characters are taken and interpreted for new social, political and cultural contexts. Characters like Rama, Ravana, Sita, Draupadi, Krishna, Ekalavya, Sambooka, Arjuna, Karna, Sabri, Bali, Urmila, Soorpanakha, Shikhandi, Shakuni, Bharata and Laxmana, and many others are invariably referred to in our daily talks in India. The killing of Sambooka by Rama for his doing penance in the *Ramayana* or the denial of Drona to educate Ekalavya in the *Mahabharata* are the subversions of core myths. These two characters are symbol of oppression. In Sara Joseph's stories, the characters like Sita, Mandodari, Soorpanakha, Manthara and the wife of Sambooka are portrayed as victims of patriarchal oppression. Ravana seems more superior to Rama. These subversive myths of oppression persuade us to rethink the social order and dharma in terms of democracy, human rights and social justice.

Vanashree Tripathy has said that "Literature and Myth merely dramatize, heighten and highlight what is theoretically possible in nature and science" (89). The inexhaustible lore of myths, parables and legends that pattern and define our culture offers immense scope for the Indian writers.

The use of myth in Indian literature can be divided into two categories: 1. Use of myth in Indian regional literature and 2. Use of myth in Indian writings in English. The researcher gives brief overview of few of the many major works from both the categories.

Myth in Indian regional writings:

Dharamvir Bharati's *Andhayug* (1954), translated into English as *The Age of Blindness* or *The Blind Age* by Alok Bhalla (2010) depicts the final day of the *Mahabharata* war. An anti-war play, *Andhayug* portrays war as destructive, inhumane and unethical. Written in the post partition period, it allegorises the violence, bloodshed, atrocities and devastation rampant at the time of partition. Thus, Bharti uses the myth to question the ethics and righteousness of an equivalent devastating event.

V S Khandekar's *Yayati* (1959) is an account of the great predecessor King of the Pandavas and the Kauravas-Yayati who indulged in bodily pleasures so much so that he exchanged his old age with the youth of his youngest son to gratify his insatiable hunger for physical pleasures. Devoid of any didacticism, the novel is a first person narration by Yayati, Devayani and Sharmishtha which presents Yayati as any other human being bearing the hues of goodness and vices both. Khandekar portrayal of Yayati connotes that he is more hated than hateful and thus, must not be judged by one vice that afflicts him.

Shivaji Sawant's *Mrityunjay* (1967) originally written in Marathi, is a semi-autobiographical account of Kunti's eldest son Karna. The novel celebrates the indomitable warrior spirit of Karna despite the wrongs meted out to him. Quintessence of generosity, he rules his kingdom of Anga with benevolence. But his upbringing in the house of a charioteer shadows all his goodness, worth and achievements emphasising the age old adage 'birth over worth'. The story is narrated from six different perspectives of Kunti, Duryodhana, Vrishali, Shon interspersed with Karna's own narration. The final chapter by Lord Krishna highlights the spiritual connect between the two where he portrays Karna in a humane light despite his faults and shortcomings.

Parva (1979) is one of the most prominent works of acclaimed Kannada author S L Bhyrappa. It is de-mythologised narration of the great epic the *Mahabharata*. The mythological element in the story are missing and the Bhyrappa places the characters and locale in 12th century B.C. All myths are presented with reasoning and made believable. All characters are more human and bereft of any divine powers. Monologues by various characters from the narrative structure of the novel. Novel begins with the preparation of the Great War and ends with the lamentation on the loss incurred and futility of war. Emotional monologues of Kunti, Bhim and Draupadi intersperse the beginning and end of war revealing their humane side than their divinity.

The prayer spoken by Draupadi after the culmination of the Great War gives the title to P K Balakrishnan's *And Now Let Me Sleep* (1973). She prays for solace after she spends uncountable sleepless nights burning in the fire of humiliation and revenge. Kunti's revelation of Karna as the eldest Pandava ignites angst, predicaments,

incertitudes, internal-conflicts and psychological metamorphosis of various characters. The initial detestation of Draupadi for Karana gradually transforms into respect with the realization that her husbands owe their life and honour to Karna.

The Second Turn or *Bhima – The Lone Warrior* or *Bhimsen* (1984) is the translation of *Randamoozham* by acclaimed Malayalam author M. T. Vasudevan Nair. Nair recreates the unsung hero of the *Mahabharata* war. Denied his due, the story aptly reveals the anguish and exasperation of the second of the Pandavas - Bhima, who was obscured by the virtuous elder brother with his claim to the throne and by his younger brother with his prestige and popularity. Nair reverses the prevalent view of Bhima as dumb witted, a glutton and a giant warrior devoid of any emotions. Instead he is portrayed as a sensitive husband and father, guilty at ignoring his other wife Hidimbi and sacrificing his son Gatothkach to save Arjuna. The novel begins in the post war period − *Mahaprasthanika Parva*, when the Pandavas renounce the world and leave for Himalayas. The author strips off the divinity from all characters and presents them as more or less humans.

Anupama Niranjana's novel *Madhavi* (2008 2ⁿᵈ Ed.) is heart rending feminist retelling of the story of a lesser known character of the *Mahabharata*. Brought up as a princess, she is the daughter of Yayati. She suffers exploitation at the hands of men. The boon of remaining a virgin throughout her life turns out to be a bane for her. She is handed over as a commodity from one king to another. Finally, she rebels and refuses to remarry. Ironically, the freedom she regains finally seems meaningless to her.

Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi (1995) by Pratibha Ray relates the story of the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of the most accomplished, devoted, sacrificing character − Draupadi. Narrated through the lens of feminism, it projects the heart

rendering sufferings of a woman who is forced into a polygamy against her wishes, who suffers at the hands of her husbands who gamble her away, at the hands of lusty men who publically disrobe her in the presence of consenscious and able rulers who remain mute spectators to her dishonour. An epitome of sacrifice and devotion, Draupadi is insulted in the court. *Yajnaseni* represents women's sufferings in a patriarchal world.

The non-fictional work like Irawati Karve's *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* (1968), dissociates the characters from their divinity and presents them as historical figures in the socio-political context. Presenting the human aspect of these characters, she spotlights their weaknesses. The three most influential women of the great epic – Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi unfold before the reader as determined, courageous and resilient. Karve poses many questions in her magnum opus ranging from the futility of Bhishma's sacrifice as the protector of the throne of Hastinapur to the probable relationship between Vidhur and Yudhishter. She justifies the behaviour of Karna and presents Krishna as more humane than divine.

Apart from these, the list goes on: Karnad's *Yayati* (1961) and *Nagmandal* (1988), Kolatkar's *Jejuri* (1976), Sitanshu Yashaschandra's *Jatayu* (1986), Ayyappa Paniker's *Kurukshetram* (1966), Sitakant Mahapatra's *Yashoda's Soliloquy* (1974), Pratibha Satpathy's *Sabari* (1991) and so on. C N Sreekantan Nair's drama trilogy *Kanchana Sita* (1961)*, Saketham* (1974) and *Lankalakshmi*, Kuvempu's play *Shudra Tapaswi* (1944), Bhishm Sahani's *Madhavi* (1982), Uday Bhembre's *Karnaparva* (1960), Karushnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar's *Keechakvadh* (1907), Karnad's, *Hyvadana* (1972) and *Fire and the Rain* (1995), Tagore's *Chitrangada* (1913), Ravindra

Kelekar's *Mahabharat: Ek Anusarjan* (1985-1991), etc. are the examples that use myth in a prominent way irrespective of their form.

Myth in Indian writings in English:

R K Narayan weaves his fiction with the ancient myths and legends taken from classical literature. Myths are utilized by drawing parallels with the contemporary situation. In no way Narayan's use of myth proves didactic. The mythical parallel between Chandran's love for Malathi and Sasanka's love for Tara is quite evident in the novel *Bachelor of Arts* (1937). Sasanka's love for his Guru's wife is unethical, and so is Chandran's love for Malathi in a society where marriages require parental approval. *The Dark Room* (1938) reflects a close parallel to the *Ramayana*. Kekeiyi's retirement to 'Kopbhawan' has echoes in Savitri's withdrawal into the darkroom when her husband's ill treatment becomes unbearable to her. Krishnan's endeavours to establish a contact with his dead wife in *The English Teacher* (1945) resonates the myth of Savitri's attempt to win back her husband Satyavan from Yamraj. *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961) draws on the myth of Bhasmasura by portraying Vasu as the demon and Natraj as Shiva. Natraj's affliction at the hands of Vasu after he provides him residence in his home has parallel strands with Lord Shiva's plight when he grants Bhasmasura, the boon. *The Painter of Signs* (1976) reverberates the Shantanu myth from the epic the *Mahabharata* to portray the bond between Daisy and Raman. *The World of Nagaraj* (1990), recollects the mythical character Narada. Nagaraj - a man with a mission - has mission to write a book on the great sage Narada – who is popular for spreading gossips though the worlds. According to Nagaraj, Narada had curse on his back that unless he spread a gossip a day, his head would burst. He carries gossips around fourteen worlds and many times it creates clashes between gods and gods,

demons and demons, gods and demons, and between creatures of the earth. The clashes brings destruction though destruction, "Evil destroyed by itself" (*The World of Nagaraj,* 103).

For Raja Rao, Myth forms an essential part of his literary works which he uses as similes to draw parallels or as links to the core ideas. The contemporary events are gain importance by the use of myth. In *Kanthapura* (1938), Rao, likens Gandhiji with the mythical characters of Rama, Krishna and Harischandra. He draws a parallel between the the protagonist Sivarama Shastri and Lakshman in his novel *The Chess Master and his Moves* (1988). Many characters in his works allude to mythical characters. Rao mentions that his writing style follows that of puranas. In *Twice Born Fiction* (1971)*,* Meenakshi Mukherjee points out the use of Puranic myths and Local myths in the Raja Rao's literary works (138-139). *Kanthapura* mythicizes the independence struggle as the war between Lord Ram and Ravana. Gandhiji is viewed as an incarnation of God sent by Brahma to fight the Britishers. The local myths such as Sthalpurana are mentioned in *Kanthapura.* There are frequent allusions to Shiva-Parvati myths in his works. Shiva-Parvati as protectors, Shiva's dance of destruction, Kailash as the abode of Shiva- all find references in his works.

Authors like Salman Rushdie, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Arun Joshi have also recurrently mingled mythology and historical chronicles to present contemporary social issues and problems. They have employed common metaphors, archetypes, myths and legends as one of the major elements in their plays. These writers have often returned to the past, to the myths to indianise their works by giving a new edifice but having a sound moral, social and cultural basis.

The Great Indian Novel (1989) by Shashi Tharoor is an excellent example of myth from the *Mahabharata*. It is a satirical novel that compares the post-independace political scenario with the *Mahabharata*. Figures from Indian history are transformed into characters from mythology. The writer recasts the story of the nascent Indian democracy as a struggle between groups and individuals closely related by their personal and political histories. Gangaji's attending the round table conference, Ved Vyas describing the divisions in Indian society, Rabindranath Tagore returning his knighthood are some of the incidents which are interwoven with the characters of the *Mahabharata*.

The Stone Women (2000) by Shashi Deshpande is a collection of short stories. She has taken women characters from the *Mahabharata*. Draupadi, Kunti, Amba, Gandhari are the icons of Indian mythology. These mythical characters have been subjected to the contemporary period and reinterpret the roles that a woman plays in her life. She is a daughter, a wife, a mother and a mistress. In the story "Hear me Sanjay", Kunti was hailed for not protesting against Pandu's overwhelming love for Madri as also for being a mute spectator to the unfair behaviors of the Kauravas towards the Pandavas. The story is the outpour of her feelings. Her desire for self-assertion resulted in the protest for regaining her lost identity. It is in the sense that she achieves her right place in the humanity.

Arun Joshi's literary works reflect a deep influence of Indian mythology. He considers Hinduism as a philosophy with a strong base in existentialism. Vedanta, Philosophy presented in Gita and Mahatma Gandhi had an indelible impression on Joshi's works. *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) and *The Apprentice* (1974) reflect the preachings of *Bhagwad Gita* propagating the three ways

of absolution from error or sin: the Karmayoga, the Jnanayoga and the Bhaktiyoga respectively. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* is torn between attachment and detachment. Following the preachings of Gita, he has a strong faith in the principle of Karma. The pursuit of material happiness seems futile to him. Likewise, Billy Biswas, the protagonist of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas,* renounces the world and goes into the lap of nature to seek peace. Ratan Rathor in *The Apprentice* follows the path of atonement to redeem himself of his sins.

In, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), Amitav Ghosh harbours the myth of Nachiketa from *Kathopanishad.* The novel's protagonist Nachiketa Bose is the mirror image of the mythical Nachiketa. Nachiketa's persistent desire to learn the mysteries of death earns him true knowledge from Yama as a boon.A similar desire reverberates in Nachiketa Bose who consistently quests for the reason behind the ills in the contemporary world. He considers wealth as evil and an enemy of humanity. The stark socio-cultural realities of the present are satirically compared to the Nachiketa myth. Ghosh divides the novel into the three gunas that *The Bhagavad Gita* advocates: Satwa, Rajas and Tamas. The novel also includes references to other myths viz. the Saraswati myth, Ganga-Jal, Kaliyug. The myth of Chitrangada and Arjun finds reflection in Kulfi, the prostitute and Jyoti Das. A similar parallel is drawn between Mangala – Laakhan/ Lutchmann and Urmila and Lakshman from the *Mahabharata* in Amitav's novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996).

Upamanyu Chatterjee's use of myth is at a psychological plane that assesses human psyche in the social context. The protagonist Agastya Sen of *English August: An Indian Story* (1988), though shares the name with the mythical Agastya rishi from the *Mahabharata,* but ironically is unable to match the deeds. Unlike the rishi who

drank the entire ocean to prevent the Vindhya ranges to spread, Sen, as an IAS officer, fails miserably in controlling the corruption in India. Allusions to myths of Durga, Mahishasurmardini, Shani and Jagdamba are frequent in the novel.

The Puffin Mahabharata (2009) by Namita Gokhale is yet another mythical story of the *Mahabharata*. She has presented the battle in a different perspective. The story of the *Mahabharata* is about defeat as much as victory, about humility as much as courage. She has tried to maintain a balance between the characters of Bhima and Duryodhana as well as Dushasana. She takes the story to the bitter end culminating not in the victory but its aftermath thereby leaving the reader with a sense of the futility of war, deprived of access to such power. A similar use of myth as allusions, references, parallels is visible in Sudhin Ghosh's *The Cradle of the Clouds* (1951) and *The Flame of the Forest* (1955)*,* B Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1958)*,* in the fiction of Mukta Mukherjee.

Use of myths in regional languages are in fact, the examples of subversion of myths through ethical, political interrogation. They break the shackles of ideological conditioning and give voices to the long-suppressed aspirations of the marginalized. But as opposed to the subversion in the regional literatures, the use of myth in Indian Writing in English was very different. The initial Indian writers who took to writing in English only alluded to the myths or drew parallels between the mythological characters or events with the contemporary ones, which is quite evident from the literary works of the forerunners of Indian writing in English viz. Raja Rao, R K Narayan.

The new millenium ushered in a paradigm shift in the use of myth in the Indian English fiction. From being merely allusive or referential in character, myths began to

be extensively subversive in line with regional literatures. The significant change can be attributed to the shift in the target audience of Indian English fiction. The forerunners like Raja Rao, R K Narayan wrote for more or less the foreign readership rather than the Indian reader. For the extensive use of myth or for the myth to be subversive, a pre-knowledge and an in depth consciousness of the same is a prerequisite. Since the foreign readers were unaware of the cultural basis of Indian mythology, these writers resorted to indirect references or mere allusions.

In his essay, "Languages of Class, Ideologies of Immigration"(1992)*,* Aijaz Ahmad points out appropriately that in India there seems to be developing a new urban culture:

> There has clearly developed, in all the cosmopolitan cities of the country, an English-based intelligentsia for whom only the literary document produced in English is a national document; all else is regional, hence minor and forgettable, so that English emerges in this imagination not as one of the Indian languages, which it undoubtedly is, but as the language of national integration and bourgeois civility. (75)

Meenakshi Mukherjee mentions *Midnight's Children* (1981) as a new experimentation and turning point Indian writings in English (182). With the dawn of globalisation and the rise of the middle class, the target audience of Indian writing in English has increased manifold. This target audience, though well versed in English language have a sound base in Indian myths, legends and folklores. Thus, the new emerging writers have begun to experiment in the subversion of the myths in their fiction.

Rationale:

"A work of art may 'die' and come alive again; once thought to be out of date, it may become modern and even prophetic for what it tells of the future. What 'works' is not the most recent temporal section, but the whole packed history of cultural texts." (Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 127)

The popularity and familiarity of Indian mythology has induced the writers of all eras to retell myths of India to suit the modern context. In the contemporary period of globalisation, new sensibilities opens up a vista for myths to be re-interpreted and re-looked. Myths are intrinsically woven with our traditions into our socio-cultural fabric re-appeared in new form. There is an emergence of a new trend of re-writing, re-creating, re-telling, remembering, re-introducing, re-imagining the myths with contemporary perspective in the present century. To search for the new venues of creative expressions, authors like Amish Tripathi, Ashok K Banker, Devdutt Pattanaik, Nilanjan P Choudhuri, Anand Neelakantan, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and many others turn towards myth. They use myth in a very prominent way. In their works, myths operate in contemporary Indian context to evolve its new discourse in Indian fiction in English. The major interests are the *Shiva Purana*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

By taking a different perspective on certain myth or the story of certain character in its entirety or taking just a fragment of some larger stories, the writers with their plight of imagination develop an entire new version relevant to contemporary scenario. With the interest in retelling the old myths and legends, they deliberately manipulate and sometimes exploit the situation to suit their artistic purpose of exposing social evils or religious sentiments.

Simultaneously, many writers have endeavoured to place long lost mythical stories in their exceedingly sublime and ecstatic literature. Indian fiction in English, in one or the other way tries to textualise living myths by creating different literary traditions. It allows an exploring of its interiors and deep rooted existence to comprehend the linkages among myths, archetypes and the development of new sensibilities in contemporary Indian society.

Simultaneously, new techniques and styles are generated by writers to reinvent its semiotics. Through the use of myths, these writers endeavour to reveal the absurdity of life, its basic passions and eternal conflicts. Along with myths, the history is contextualized by itself. Ancient myths are deployed in today's context to provide the matrix of history, philosophy and psychology. They evaluate, examine and criticize the contemporary society by such creative practices. In their works, myths operate in contemporary Indian context to evolve its new tradition in Indian fiction in English. The new lexicon and discourse are invented to represent mythology in new way.

Finally, they point towards the representation of social ideologies and are inter-related within the culture that operates. Their creativity underlies in the fusion of fragments of historical-legendary experience into a forceful statement. These writers connect the past and the present, the archetypal and the real, by the use of 'grammar of literary archetype'. The contemporary writers also attempt to instill an alienation effect by driving the material of their work from the folk tales, folk-expressions etc. and also by using the 'non-materialistic techniques' of the traditional Indian literature. They deftly explore the prescription of social relations by means of Indian mythology, trying to establish the relationship that originate out of the emotional needs of human beings coming in contact with one another. Thus, literature based on myth simultaneously can

be entertainment, political commentary and artistic statement and can be composed in traditional, realistic and postmodern forms.

This confluence of mythology and fiction has become a trendsetter in Indian Writing in English. The emergence of mythological novels in present century and its tremendous popularity require exploration. The ancient myths are used in such a way that accommodates the very objective that accumulates the need for the research. Questions like how myths have revived in the contemporary era and why Indian mythology has captivated writers and the readers in the present state of technological advancement need to be answered. There seems a need to explore the area to seek out the reasons in the new interest of the myths. The current research project theoretically explores the phenomenon of 'proliferation of mythological novels' by focusing on the social, cultural and political context in the present era of globalisation.

The objective of the research is to explore why and how myth novels have gained unprecedented popularity. The important objective of this research is to study the reasons behind this resurgence of myth in Indian fiction in English and the subsequent unparalleled interest generated in mythological writings in English. The focus is on examining how these writers in their texts display an array of divergent attitudes towards the characters and incidents in the Indian Epics and Mythology, how these versions of ancient texts reinterpret the mythical past, and how the respective authors utilize myth creatively for coming to terms with the predicament of the present.

The thesis speculates various cultural reasons and underlying social dynamics of this proliferation by eclectically drawing upon ideas from number of theorists and critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee, Partha Chatterjee, Pavan Varma, Anthony Giddens, Andre Lefevere, Yuri Lotman as well as Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Fredric

Jameson. The thesis analyses the concepts of globalization and identity that cast an indelible impression on the selected contemporary myth novels by combining various analytical perspectives like Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies and Cultural Semiotics.

The genesis of the words – 'Hindu', 'Hindustan', and 'Hinduism' is highly debatable. The widely accepted explanation of these terms is that the word 'Hindu' has its roots in Persian language and has a geographical reference. It refers to the Sindhu or Indus River. 'S' sounds like 'H' in ancient Persian language. So the word 'Sindhu' became 'Hindu'. India was the land beyond the Indus River hence the name India. Hindustan is the word that refers to the the land inhabited by the Hindus. Till 12th century, the word Hindu denoted only region and not religion. According to Devdan Chaudhury, no Sanskrit religious texts of Sanatan Dharma use the word 'Hindu'. This is the reason that the term Hindu is not mentioned in the "Vedas, Upanishads or Buddhist Scriptures" (Devdan Chaudhuri, 2017) Hinduism was one of the British strategies to unleash their imperial power upon India. In his article, "How did Hindus become Hindu and why Hindutva is not Hinduism" (2017), Devdan Chaudhury states,

> The essential truth is that the people of India started to think themselves to be 'Hindus' slowly over several centuries, after 12th century. This happened because of the Central Asian invasions that slowly popularised the Persian word among the populace. And the Imperial British added 'ism' to Hindu in the early 19th century in order to execute its divide and rule strategy. (Devdan Chaudhuri, 2017)

The set of religious doctrines, philosophical dogmas, traditions, beliefs and rituals practiced since the Vedic age, came to be termed as 'Hinduism' as recent as the

first decade of the 19th century by a renowned scholar – Sir Monier Monier-Williams in his book entitled *Hinduism* (1877). Originating in the Indian subcontinent and widely practiced by a vast majority, it is more or less a way of life. Thus, despite the antiquity, the term Hinduism is relatively new. Before the coinage of the term 'Hinduism' by the Europeans, the religious, cultural and philosophical traditions in India were defined by ideas like Sanatan Dharma. Sanatan dharma believes in universal equilibrium and is referred as a unified world religion.

All the diverse philosophical traditions and the sub-traditions which originated in India are part of Sanatan Dharma that translates to 'Eternal Law' or 'Eternal Way of Things' or 'Eternal Order'. What are now called Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism were the sub-cultures (with sub-sub-cultures) within the larger culture of Sanatan Dharma. Plurality and syncretism were the essential part of Sanatan Dharma; this is reflected in the diversity of modern India… All the traditions and sub-traditions of all the religions under Sanatan Dharma stem from the major schools of Indian thought: the Vedas, the Upanishads, Buddhism, Jainism, Samkhyas, Advaita, Kashmir Shaivism etc. They have got mingled with myths, legends, folklore, epic literature, passage of history and regional propensities to produce the diversity of religious and spiritual practices of India (Devdan Chaudhuri, 2017).

Critics have called Hinduism a colonial, orientalist or brahminical construct. There existed a continuous interaction between the top Brahmanical order and local religious groups whereby the latter adapted their religious beliefs to those held by the Brahmins. The local tribal gods and goddesses are identified with the Vedic gods or considered as their reincarnation, thus, amalgamating them in the fold of Hinduism.

The converse process has, on the contrary, made Hinduism more rich, diverse and tolerant. This assimilation has resulted in the vast reservoir of stories, legends, folktales and myths and their variants.

In their article, "Hinduism" (2018) available on Encyclopedia Britannica, Arthur Llewellyn Basham, and et al. give brief introduction to the concept of Hinduism in social, religious and cultural contexts. There are five elements: doctrine, practice, society, story, and devotion that have shaped Hinduism to its present form. Doctrine is expressed in the Vedas. It delineates the correlation between divine and the worldly. It deals with the ideals of dharma, moksha and karma. Practice, commonly termed as *Puja,* is related to common code of ritual behavior despite the diversity in Hinduism. Society stratified Hindu life in terms of varna system. Apart from varna system, there exist an extensive caste system based on birth. A Rig Vedic hymn defines the social order comprising of four Varnas: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and nobles), Vaishyas (commoners), and Shudras (servants).

Hinduism prides itself for its extensive store of stories of divinity, of interaction of gods and humans. These stories – collectively known as mythology – focus on the divine power and exceptional deeds of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. The thematic concerns of these stories are human experience, love, conflict between duty and pleasure. These stories not only bind Hindus into a single whole but sometimes create tensions too, especially, when these narratives are retold from the perspective of the marginalised. The inherent male centric, upper caste bias in these narratives are challenged and questioned by the voices from the periphery. Lastly, the fifth element – devotion stands for bhakti. Apart from rituals and traditions, poems and hymns are composed to promote devotion.

Since a single doctrinal authority cannot define Hinduism, the practitioners followed different traditions or denominations centred on one god or goddess. The four major sects *Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism* and *Smartism*. The first three have a primary deity - Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti respectively. Smartism has five deities – Ganesha at the center, covered by Shiva, Durga, Vishnu and Surya from four sides. It posits equal importance to all five gods.

Vaishnavites consider Vishnu as the supreme god and have faith in the ten incarnations of Vishnu. He is the preserver the cosmos. The most worshipped incarnations are Rama and Krishna. Their stories are mentioned in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and thus are the reservoir of umpteen myths. The key scriptural texts of the Vaishnava sect are: the Vedas, the Upanishads, *Vishnu Purana* and *Bhagavat Purana*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Agamas*. For Shaivites, the supreme god is Shiva. Shiva is worshipped in varied forms: the formless, Linga and Nataraj. He is viewed as the destroyer of the world. Most of the myths are recounted in the *Shiva Purana* and *Linga Purana*. Shaktism sect has goddesses like Kali, Durga, Laxmi or Saraswati as the primary deity. Shaktas worship goddess Shakti as the strength underlying the male principle. Shakti takes the form of Laxmi – wife of Vishnu and Parvati – consort of Shiva. Thus, Shakti can be seen as a link between both Vaishnavism and Shaivism. The key texts that source Shaktism are *Devi Mahatmaya, Devi-Bhagavata Purana* and *Shakta Upanishads* especially the *Devi Upanishad.*

Despite the differences, all denominations are linked and basically share certain texts, concepts, identifiable rituals, and cosmology. Different myths emanating from these sects are immensely diverse. These myths emphasise the essence of one's existence, human state and the innate desires by positing good against evil, humane

against cruel, righteous against sinners, principled against unethical. The Hindu legends reiterate the impermanence of everything in this world.

Hindu mythology has its genesis in numerous Sanskrit texts like the *Rig Veda*, the Puranas, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Instead of having consistent and monolithic structure, Hindu mythology has various versions and diversities according to rituals, traditions, and regions. The Hindu texts can be classified into *Sruti*: those which can be heard and *Smriti:* those which can be memorised. The Vedas and their embedded texts –*the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* fall into the first category (Doniger, *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*, 2–3).

The *Rig Veda* is considered as one of the major earliest sources of myths. An anthology of hymns dedicated to gods, it was orally bequeathed from generation to generation before it got scribed centuries later; thus, engendering various variants of myths. Brahmanas are another texts that elaborate rituals in terms of mythology. The *Mahabharata* depicts the Great War between the Kauravas and the Pandavas from Kuru clan, weaving innumerable myths along with history and philosophy in its main plotline. The *Ramayana*, another great epic, narrates the story of Rama, a prince of Ikshvaku clan. The eighteen Puranas include myths extensively. Most of them carry different versions of the same myths due to their sectarian bias. These myths have been retold and reinterpreted from time to time. Most of the times, the modern retelling remains faithful to its Puranic or epic background in terms of plot and treatment.

But when it comes to the tribal versions of the myth, the scenario changes. The myths that seldom deviate from their source and traditional texts, are subverted and sometimes reversed.

More significant divergences may be found in the mythologies of the isolated, primitive tribes of India, which often utilize Hindu motifs but transform them into different, sometimes almost unrecognizable tales when absorbing them into their non-Hindu ideological frameworks. (Doniger, *Hindu Myths*, 12)

There is an ongoing controversy about the date and time of myths. "There is no single 'basic' version of a Hindu myth; each is told and retold with a number of minor and major variations over the years" (Doniger, *Hindu Myths*, 15). As they passed orally over centuries, they were modified and manipulated; hence many versions. But Doniger quotes Levi Strauss "who has said that while poetry may be lost in translation, 'the mythical value of myths remains preserved through the worst translation'" (16).

These myths encompass a wide variety of subjects including inexplicable facts like the origin of the universe, human forms and other creatures, origin of gods, the conflict between the Devas and Asuras, ethics and principles for a good life, harmony between people, resolution of any conflicts, paths that an individual can follow in his lifetime and at various stages of one's life, the meaning underlying our existence, causes of our suffering, the cycle of birth and rebirth and finally the salvation.

The thesis attempts to look at the employment, revision, reinterpretation, transformation, recontextualisation, and subversion of myths in contemporary mythological novels. The thesis studies and analyses the following novels.

1. Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Palace of Illusions.* Picador India, 2008.
2. Pattanaik, Devdutt. *The Pregnant King*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2008.
3. Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*. Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2010.

4. Tripathi, Amish. *The Immortals of Meluha*. Westland Ltd, 2010.

5. Banker, Ashok. *Vengeance of Ravana.* Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 2011.

6. Choudhury, Nilanjan. *Bali and the Ocean of Milk.* HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

7. Neelakantan, Anand. *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished.* Platinum Press, 2012.

8. Tripathi, Amish. *The Secrets of Naga*. Westland Ltd, 2012.

9. Tripathi, Amish. *The Oath of Vayuputras*. Westland Ltd, 2013.

The above selection of primary texts is based on the following rationale. The authors of the texts use various mythological sources like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* to recount the mythological tales. All the texts are 21st century texts, written in English and use myth in a prominent way. In-depth analysis of the texts can be resourceful to grasp how myths are treated in the 21st century in English language.

The whole tradition of rewriting Indian myth in English began with the publication of Ashok Banker's first book of *Ramayana Series – The Prince of Ayodhya* (2003). The book is followed by *Siege of Mithila* (2003), *Demons of Chitrakut* (2004), *Armies of Hanuman* (2005), *Bridge of Rama* (2005), *King of Ayodhya* (2006), *Vengeance of Ravana* (2011), and *Sons of Sita* (2012). Before Banker based his fiction entirely on myth, myth was merely used as referential by Indian writers in English. The credit of placing myth at the centre stage of Indian fiction in English lies with Banker. Though he treats the plot with slight twists and turns and adds western thrillers like special effects, throughout the series, he remains faithful to the original plot. The seventh book of the series is based on the story of return of the Ravana as evil cannot

be destroyed forever. He treats Ravana as villain. Thus, *Vengeance of Ravana* (2011) is selected in the thesis for the analysis.

Amish Tripathi's trilogy is based on *Shiva Purana*. The novel recreates the history of a man named Shiva who was deified many years later. Thus, Amish Tripathi's portrayal of Shiva as worldly, human and devoid of divinity in his Trilogy is a significant shift from the general line of myth novels.

The novel by Devdutt Pattanaik, *The Pregnant King* has been selected as it focuses on the story of lesser known characters from the *Mahabharata* instead of recounting the tale of significant characters of the epic. The choice of the novel was propelled by the fact that the author assimilates regional variations of the classical myth, stories of woman protagonist (Shilavati) and transgender (Shikhandi) in his comprehensive novel. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* is a retelling of the *Mahabharata*. Pattanaik's comments in every chapter highlight the derivations of the myth and also the customs and traditions that emanate from these stories. To understand the great epic, Patnaik places equal importance on the three cults of Hindu mythology: Vaishnava, Shaiva and Shakti, from which he draws his myths.

Apart from the above, Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of Illusion* is the novel narrated from Draupadi's point of view. Nilanjan P. Choudhury's *Bali and the Ocean of Milk* retells the tale from The *Bhagavata Purana*. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* narrates the story of Ravana from a different perspective. All three novels have subversive tone and are the narratives of the marginalised. The latter two texts share sympathy towards asura race and demystify the idea of hegemony of Varna system and racial discrimination.

The selected texts clearly fall into two categories: one which delineates refraction, and the other category which clearly questions the age-old ideology reflected through popular Indian myths.

Amish Tripathi

Born in Mumbai 1974, grown up in Odisha, Amish Tripathi is a graduate of IIM-Calcutta. After serving in banking services for 14 years, he turned into fulltime writer. Feeling his life devoid of meaning, he decided to leave the profession of banker and opted for a path 'less travelled by'. While reading various philosophical writings and Indian mythology, new ideas started taking shape in his mind. While reverberating on the idea of the evil inside the humans, he came across an argument that in ancient Persia, demons were known as Daeva, and Angels were known as Asuras. It dawned on Amish that various civilizations approach a particular idea in many different ways. Getting inspiration from his grandfather and other family members, Tripathi decided to write a non-conformal, untraditional novel on Lord Shiva.

He has six books – *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013), known as the Shiva Trilogy, and *Ram – Scion of Ikshvaku* (2015), *Sita – Warrior of Mithila* (2017) known as the Ram Chandra Series, and *Immortal India – Young Country, Timeless Civilisation* (his first non-fiction book) (2017) – to his credit. His way of storytelling, style to weave philosophy into the plot and religious symbolism take mythology into another paradigm. These books are translated into many Indian regional languages. He has received a list of awards – Kalinga Literary Award 2018, Icon of the Year Award 2017,

Raymond Crossword Book Award 2016, Dainik Bhaskar Literature Award 2016 and Society Young Achievers Award for literature 2013 are a few to name.

The Immortals of Meluha, the first novel in the trilogy, set in the land of Meluha – the name of Indus Valley Civilisation – narrates the story of Shiva, a common leader from Tibet and his migration to Meluha in search of a better life. Meluha is a utopia – a complete empire established by Lord Ram – ruled by King Daksha. When Shiva is given Somras – the Meluhan drink that prolongs one's life, his throat turns blue; hence the name – Neelkanth. Shiva, once recognized as the saviour, rages war upon Chandravanshis, their age long enemies. They are believed to be in alliance with the cursed Nagas and are thought to be problem creators for Meluha in every possible way. Shiva's journey for the search of evil takes a different course when he reaches Ayodhya and comes to know about the Chandravanshis.

Shiva reaches Devagiri, Meluhan capital where he meets Sati, princess of Meluha. She is a Vikarma – an untouchable due to her sins in the previous birth. Shiva falls in love with her and marries her by dissolving Vikarma law. He meets Brihaspati, who is the chief scientist of Meluha. Brihaspati supervises the manufacturing facility of somras and conducts scientific experiments at Mount Mandar. Here, Shiva comes to know about many scientific and logical explanations which are considered magic till now.

In between, there is an attack on Mount Mandar, many die including Brihaspati. When it is final that the attack is carried out by Naga people in collaboration with Chandravanshis, Shiva is furious and decides to take revenge of the death of his best friend. With the help of Devagiri's Chief Minister Kanakhala and the Head of Meluhan Army, Parvateshwar, Shiva leads an army towards Swadweep. A fierce battle rages

which witnesses the victory of Shiva. The Chandravanshi king is captured. Shiva is surprised to find Chandravanshis' faith in the legend of Neelkanth. Many mysteries are revealed. With the conversation with priest at the Ram temple of Ayodhya, the capital of Swadweep, Shiva comes to know about his fate, karma and choices. The book ends with Naga attack on Sati and Shiva trying to save her.

The Secret of the Nagas is full of secrets and mysteries as its title suggests. The second volume of trilogy begins exactly where the first ends. Shiva and Sati fight with the Naga. When defeated by Shiva and Sati, Naga leaves on the horse. He throws some coins to the owner of the horse. These coins are revealed to be from King Chandraketu from Branga. After saving Sati, Shiva takes a small troop of soldiers and travels in the lands of Branga in search of Naga people. They travel to Kashi to meet Branga people to find out more about Nagas. The land of Branga has its own secrets. Parvateshwar, when he is seriously injured by civil attack, is treated with Branga herbs by Divodas. Ayurvati tells Shiva that the herb contains ingredients which are only available in Panchavati, the land of the Nagas. They also come to know that Branga people are suffering from some plague. This herb only can postpone death a little.

Shiva decides to travel to the land of Naga. Sati stays back at Kashi. When she is attacked by liger, she is saved by a group of Nagas. She meets her twin sister. She is the Naga Queen Kali denounced by his father Daksha because she is born with deformities and has extra pair of hands. The secret of the Nagas is revealed. Nagas are the people abandoned by Meluhans, born with some physical deformities. Sati also meets her first born Ganesh. He is the Lord of the People. He too was abandoned by Daksha because of his physical deformity.

At Branga, Shiva meets Parshuram who gives recipe of the medicine to Branga people. He turns to be one of the Vasudev who are guiding Shiva in his journey. He comes to Kashi with Shiva and after the tribulations, we witness the family reunion – Shiva, Sati, Ganesh and Kali. Shiva then decides to travel to Panchavati. Enroute, their entourage is attacked by Daivi-Astras which are forbidden from being used by Lord Rudra himself. When they reach Panchavati, the greatest secret of the book is revealed. Brihaspati is found alive and he is teaching in the school of the Naga capital.

The Oath of the Vayuputras, the final book in the Shiva trilogy, sums up the grand tale of the legendary warrior Shiva. In the beginning of the novel, Shiva discovers that Somras is the true evil. Brihaspati explains how it causes the plague and deformities. It is Somras that is responsible for the deformities of the Nagas. The toxic waste that remains after the manufacturing of Somras caused the Branga plague. People like Daksha, Dilipa and Bhrigu used it at the cost of many innocent lives to remain in the position of power and to live longer. Despite its devastating effect on the newborns and the Branga people, it is used extensively by Meluhans.

Apart from this, Shiva also comes to know about the oath of Vayuputras, a legendary tribe that train a member as Neelkanth. So when the evil rises, Neelkanth can be the saviour. He meets the chief of Vasudev – Gopal, who explains everything to Shiva. All the mysteries seem to have meaning in the plot. To save people from this evil Somras, Shiva declares a war on the people who use it. With the help of his allies, Shiva successfully destroys Devagiri. In the epilogue, Shiva returns to Kailash with his sons, Kartik and Ganesh. Sati later becomes known as Shakti Peethas.

Instead of portraying Lord Shiva as supreme god, Tripathi gives him a history. He narrates Shiva's journey from being a common leader to the Great Neelkanth. By

destroying Vikarma law, denying the higher god-like place in the society, accepting Nagas with their deformities, destroying Somras and Devagiri, he is proved to be the real destroyer of the evil at the end of the trilogy.

Devdutt Pattanaik

Devdutt Pattanaik is one of the prominent Indian mythologists. He writes on mythology by giving it a shade of modernity. He was a medical professional and worked in healthcare and pharma industries for 15 years. He is author of more than 30 books and innumerable articles. His major works include, *Myth = Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (2006)*, Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010), *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013), *Shikhandi: And Other Tales They Don't Tell You* (2014) and *The Pregnant King* (2008). He presents old mythology with new and fresh interpretations and observations. In his writings, he challenges conventional views of the myths and provides scope to rethink age old perspectives. He worked in many TV shows as consultant like *Devon Ke Dev... Mahadev* in Star Plus and *Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik* in Epic channel. He was also consulted by Star TV network on mythological teleserials like *Mahabharata* and *Siya ke Ram*. An important aspect of his writings is that they always contain certain sketches that he draws himself. In his interview with Hindustan Times, he stated that, "No society can exist without myth as it creates notions of right and wrong, good and bad, heaven and hell, rights and duties" (Hindustan Times).

The Pregnant King (2008) retells the story of Yuvanashva from the *Mahabharata*. As the title suggests, he gets pregnant and gives birth to a son, Mandhata. A new narrative fashions out ancient mythological incident into new tale of men and women, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. The

novel challenges biological roles of men and women by creating a space where these predetermined roles can be negotiated. Not only does the novel follow the chronology of events very strictly, it also manipulates the story by inventing few imaginary characters. The novel contests the idea of dharma in its own way. Through the character of Yuvanashva, Pattanaik proves that dharma can be manipulated and does not follow fixed set of rules. When it comes to sexuality, the novel treats it as objective.

The novel begins with the marriage of Shilavati and Prasenjit. Prasenjit is prophesied to die after two years of marriage. He fathers a son Yuvanashva. After the death of her husband, Shilavati becomes the ruler of Vallabhi because she can understand dharma better than any man.

When Yuvanashva becomes young to marry, he is married to three queens. But he fails to give birth to a son who can rule the kingdom after him. Yuvanashva is denied to participate in the Great War because he cannot produce an heir. Agitated and angry, he, with the help of two Siddhas, Yaja and Upajaya, conducts a ritual from which a magical potion is prepared. He drinks the potion accidently and gives birth to a son Mandhata. He also succeeds to impregnate his second wife Pulomi. She gives birth to Jayanta. Now Yuvanashva is both – a mother to Mandhata and a father to Jayanta. Yuvanshva faces the crisis of inbetweenness. The novel also recounts the stories of Shikhandi, Iravan, Illeshwara, and Somvat. Rooted deeply in mythology, Pattanaik's first novel overthrows social set up of sex, gender, caste and customs. Yuvanashva's three wives are the example of how dharma and defined roles can topple people. When they are unable to give birth to children, they are blamed by others and feel guilty. The novel depicts the mental state of the wife when the husband brings a new wife at home.

Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata (2010) is a book that retells the Sanskrit epic the *Mahabharata* (originally known as Jaya or 'Voctory') in modern English. It weaves the ocean of events and incidents of the *Mahabharata* from classical Sanskrit to regional versions of the epic including the Pandvani of Chhattisgarh, Gondhal of Maharashtra, Terukkuttu of Tamil Nadu, and Yakshagana of Karnataka. The book is full of cross references and side stories. While maintaining the aura of the original version, the author gives it new directions by rendering various local folktales and legends. With 108 chapters and 250 sketches drawn by the author himself, the book provides the stories of Barbareek, Iravan, Astika, Madhavi and Jaimini. With clear and simple style, the book gives an opportunity to know the ancient epic in a very concise way.

Ashok Banker

Ashok Kumar Banker had spent his 51 summers in Bombay, India before he moved to Los Angeles, United States in 2015. Inheriting a mixed lineage from a British grandmother and an Indian Christian grandfather from Goa, Ashok happened to spend his childhood with his grandmother who raised, encouraged, supported and even financed him in his first writing endeavour at the age of fifteen.

Banker designates himself as 'post-racial post-religious' Indian and refuses to conform to the caste based social hierarchy and religious identity. The separatism and bias inherent in the religion of his estranged biological father drove him away from Hinduism and as a child, Banker had no exposure to Hindu epics, culture, traditions or values. Surprisingly, it is the retelling of the great Hindu epics- eight-volume *Ramayana Series* that has won him world-wide acclaim. *The New York Times* lays the onus of resurgence of myth in Indian literature on Banker. Commenting on his works,

it states that his books are "better written than many books in the genre that have followed – introduced the *Ramayana* to a new generation of readers." His works have been included in the anthologies such as *The Vintage Book of Modern Indian Literature* and *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. His books have been translated in over 16 languages and have sold over 2 million copies worldwide.

Banker was a freelance journalist for newspapers like *The Outlook* and *The Times of India*, a literary critic, reviewer and essayist exposing the western bias towards South Asian writers before taking up fiction writing. Banker experimented with various genres spanning from crime thrillers to Science fiction and fantasy to retellings of myth. *Devi* features Avtars of Hindu Goddess-Devi and *Gods of War* (2009) is written in Western style fantasy. Three of Banker's works are autobiographical in nature: *Vertigo, Byculla Boy* and *Beautiful Ugly. Krishna Coriolis Series, Mahabharata Series, Epic Love Stories, Itihasa stories, Future Stories* are a few to name multi volume series. *The Ramayana Series* is an eight books series which is an imaginative retelling of the epic. The most conspicuous quality of his mythological writings is his portrayal of gods and goddesses in a more humane light. Epic India Library is an endeavour to retell the myths and legends of India in one magnum opus of 70 volumes.

Vengeance of Ravana is seventh book in *Ramayana Series*. The story begins at the point when Rama is living peaceful life with his beloved wife Sita in Ayodhya. But he hears the voice of someone in his dreams. The voice warns Rama to come out and see the hazardous situation of Ayodhya. He cannot see the face but he knows the voice. It is of Ravana and Rama sees that he is back. Rishi Valmiki visits Ayodhya with the news that Ayodhya will have bad times. The city is attacked by rakshasa Kala-Nemi and Ravana's Uncle. Ravana's son Atikay – Ravana's son and Queen Mandodari (Ravana's wife) arrived at the gate of Ayodhya to avenge the death of Ravana. There

is a revelation about Sita's identity that she is the daughter of Ravana. Soon Lord Shiva arrives through the Vortal. There is long and philosophical conversation among Rama, Sita, Yama and Lord Shiva that reveals that Lord Vishnu, here Rama, has to wake up and interfere in greater things than this life on earth. In the end, Sita is accused by Rama for hiding her and her unborn children's true identity. He exiles her.

Nilanjan P Choudhury

Nilanjan P Choudhury is an alumnus of IIM Ahmedabad and IIT Kanpur. He lives in Bangalore working in IT industry. He has two novels, *Bali and the Ocean of the Milk* (2011), *The Case of the Secretive Sister* (2014), and a play titled *The Square Root of a Sonnet* to his credit.

Bali and the Ocean of Milk (2011) reimagines the myth of King Bali and the churning of the Ocean. The novel introduces many characters from old mythology with new light. To make it sound like contemporary, or to give it contemporary colour, the plot is twisted and modified. The eternal conflict between gods and asuras is portrayed with humour and thrill. Informally, the novel can be divided into two parts – the first part be the churning of the Ocean and the second be its consequences.

In the beginning, we come to know that Indrah is suffering from old age and he is losing his strength even to lift his weapon Vajra. When he approaches the Holi Trinity – Lord Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva – here Sambha, Viru and Jai, Viru suggests a plan to churn out the Ocean of the milk and acquire Amrit to heal the problem. But this task must be carried out with the support of King Bali and other Asuras. The plan is made and the Ocean of the Milk is churned. When the Halahal and Amrit come out of the ocean, Lord Jai drinks the poison. But the effect of the poison is so strong that everyone has to run away to save their life. Many die and few are saved. Indrah takes

all the Amrit and flees to the Swarga. Kind Bali is cheated and Jai and Viru takes refuge in some distant cave. After the failure of getting nectar, King Bali takes revenge on Indrah. He caught Indrah and put him into the dungeon. After losing his wife Avani, King Bali renounced the physical world and takes the spiritual path. Suketu, the chief of the Brotherhood, takes command of the kingdom and manipulates every law. The development and changes made by Bali are reversed and manipulated. In the name of Moral Cleansing or Cultural department, non-asura people are killed and harassed. They are tortured and kept in the concentration camps. Finally, with the help of Indrah, Jai and Viru, Bali succeeds in killing Suketu. The order is established once again.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Conferred with numerous International awards, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has to her credit 18 books of poetry, short stories and novels spotlighting the themes of South Asian immigrant experience, cross-cultural encounter, and women. She has experimented with myth, magic realism, fiction, historical fiction. Translated into over twenty nine languages, her work has been published in numerous magazines including *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker* and anthologies like *The Best American Short stories* and *O Henry Prize stories* have included her short stories.

An Indian-American, Divakaruni has her roots in Calcutta where she completed her graduation from University of Calcutta and immigrated to United States for her higher studies. Completing her Master's from Wright State University, Divakaruni pursued her Doctorate on Christopher Marlowe from University of California, Berkeley. Presently, she is McDavid Professor of Creative Writing at University of Houston, Texas.

Chitra's literary journey began as a poet winning prestigious awards- Gerbode Award, Barbara Deming Memorial Award for her collections *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991) and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997). Her trial with poetry did not last long and she found her true potential in fiction for which she attained world-wide acclaim. In 1995, Chitra published many collections of short stories for which she won American Book Award, PEN Josephine Miles Award and Bay Area Book Reviewers Award and many others. Her major novels include *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), its sequel *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), *One Amazing Thing* (2010), *Oleander Girl* (2013), *Before We Visit the Goddess* (2016). Apart from these, Divakaruni has also written Young Adult Fantasy series entitled *The Brotherhood of the Conch* (2004-2009).

The Palace of Illusions (2008), narrated from Draupadi's first person point of view, reimagines the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective. Begin with her birth from fire, the novel transcends the patriarchal social set up. As she is unwanted child, she is named after her father Drupad. There are other names like Panchali, Krishnaa too but she never finds them important. She is brought up with Dhai maa and her brother Dhri. She marries Pandava prince Arjuna but has to marry his four brothers too. She reigns as the queen in her palace. She is insulted, disrobed, and serves as maid. Her life is full of ups and downs. She goes to the forest with their husbands. She knew that the home – her palace, she will never get it back. A constant companion to Pandavas in their journey of claiming their right, Draupadi manifests her inner world and desires. The palace of illusions is the symbol of the desire of every woman.

Anand Neelakantan

An Engineer by profession with Indian Oil Corporation, Anand Neelakantan also indulges in freelance cartooning for Malyalam magazines apart from writing fiction. Neelakantan's first book –*Asura: The Tale of the Vanquished* (2012) is his take on the ancient Indian epic The *Ramayana*. He goes on to tell the tale of the silenced Asura – the defeated Ravana. The book became an instant success, topping the best seller charts. The book was shortlisted for Crossword Popular Award in the year 2013. *The Indian Express* rated him as one of the most promising writers.

Anand published his next series based on *The Mahabharata.* This series contains two books, *Ajaya – Roll of the Dice* and *Ajaya – Rise of Kali*, published in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Apart from the books, Neelakantan has written scripts for many mythology based Television serials. His next book – *Devyani* is an experiment in fantasy fiction and he dedicates it to his 'Harry Potter fan' daughter because he wants her to believe that our mythology is equally 'exciting and not boring'.

Asura tells the story of Ravana. It is an epic of defeat. The author tries to give voice to the vanquished in the holy war of good and evil. The novel begins at the end of the war. Ravana is dying and he sees Bhadra nearby. Then Ravana takes the reader in the past. From a neglected family of four without his father, Ravana reaches to the heights of glory during his life. He establishes an empire and wins many deva kingdoms. Leading from one victory to another, Ravana gives new hope to the Asura people of the better world. Though he is nearly successful in creating an empire, like other empires, this one too cares least about the poor and helpless people like Bhadra.

The novel has two narrators – Ravana and Bhadra. Ravana narrates from the view of a man of ambition and Bhadra is common man's voice. Both the voices contradict sometimes but that give the novel authenticity of the events looked at with

different perspectives. The characters are treated more like humans with follies and faults.

The novel does mention some of the characters like King Mahabali, Vedavathi and Sita with different perspective. Here, king Mahabali inspires Ravana to fulfil his dream of establishing great empire. Sita is daughter of Ravana in the novel. She is the nemesis of Lanka and must be killed in order to save Lanka from doom. Vedavathi is a Brahmin girl with whom Ravana falls in love. Ravana does not abduct Sita to marry, but he wants to rescue his daughter from the hardships of Deva traditions like to follow husband in the forest for fourteen years. The novel unfailingly mentions the ill-side of Deva people. It criticizes their ways of life and customs. The novel does mention the wrong ways of the army of Ram to win the war against Ravana.

Generally seen as "a traditional story in pre-literary society dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, and heroes that serve as types in a primitive view of the world, myth is also creation of an evolved, literary culture constituted many a time of 'fiction or half-truths forming part of the ideology of the society: a notion bases more on tradition and convenience of the fact" (*Great Illustrated Dictionary*, Vol II 'London: Readers Digest Association, 1984', p-1128).

In his essay "Literature as Context: Milton's Lycidas", Frye says, "In its simplest English meaning, a myth is a story about god" (440). Frye's definition of myth as 'a story about god' and/ from the Indian classical mythological stories the shaping principle of work of literature broadly encompasses myths employed by Indian authors in their works. Taking this simple meaning of myth as a point of departure, the research intends to complicate and problematize this definition using the theorisation by Northrop Frye, Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Yuri Lotman and Fredric Jameson.

The thesis takes myth as the stories of heroes, warriors, saints, sages, Gods and Goddesses from Epics, Puranas, Vedas and Upanishads. Retelling of the stories in the form of modern novels in contemporary context discloses social problems and cultural issues. Present day challenges are moulded in the stories of characters from Indian Mythology. Demystification of myth reveals many delusions and tricks that superficially make up national and social culture.

The examination on Indian literatures should not take a single and internal perspective, but should be connected to understanding of contemporary society, and to existing aesthetics and poetics.

The discussion on the term 'contemporary' is necessary. The discussion on the term 'contemporary' would be foregrounded within the understanding of 'contemporariness'. To understand contemporary literature is to elucidate its contemporariness, and to judge its value of existence. Indian literature should be interpreted with the understanding of contemporary society and existing aesthetics and poetics. Though there are many views about the timeline regarding the historical and economical changes as far as India is concerned, the term contemporary is used in the context of 21st century Indian writings in English. Though many economic, social and cultural changes took place in 1990s, the present research takes the year 2000 as dividing line.

Because of the globalisation process, many important cultural and social changes took place in India after the millennium. The meaning of the word contemporary is taken as 'relevant to the current time'. Myth narratives reveal the fact that myths are relevant and are to be related to the contemporary life in the period of globalisation. They embody the very contemporary social and cultural issues and

challenges of India. Along with that, the development of a new kind of discourse in the same sphere conveys their hidden but relevant problems of life. The various shades of myths exist and are recurring through narratives at present time. Retelling, rewriting, reimaging and recreating them reserve a new place for Indian writings in English into global literature.

As globalisation exploded after new millennia, the identity is being threatened, questioned and erased. According to Anthony Giddens in *The Consequences of Modernity* (1991), "Globalization is the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (64). Melting away of geographical boundaries, initiation of the advent of multinationals, the intervention caused by globalisation greatly affected almost all national and cultural artifacts like national literature, film industry, television serials, local cafe culture.

The present research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What role have globalisation and the emerged new elite English speaking class to play in the resurgence of mythological novels in India?
2. Why and how have mythological novels gained unprecedented popularity among the elite English speaking class in India?
3. What are the questions of cultural identity and nation that the texts raise in the context of globalization?

The thesis contains five chapters:

Chapter I:

Introduction: Definition of myth and myth in Indian Fiction in English

The chapter discusses various definitions of the term 'myth'. The myths by critics like Eric Gould, Northrop Frye, Dorairaj, Mishra Ratneshwar, William Bascom, Warren and Wallek, Mark Schorer, Claude Levi-Strauss, Peter Calvecorossi, and Roland Barthes, Lotman's view on myth.

The chapter explores the use of myth in Indian literature in regional languages in general and in English language in particular. Though myth has been used extensively in Indian literature especially in poetry and drama, the chapter discusses review of certain important regional literature which use myth in a prominent way. Apart from that, the brief overview of myth in the novels of prominent Indian English Writers like R K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and others is discussed which is further developed into the use of myth in other contemporary writers like Shashi Deshpande, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie and others. The chapter provides the historical overview of how myths have been used as an important tool to expose above mentioned issues and challenges in Indian English literature. The chapter ends by setting the background of the research by elaborating the rationale, it mentions the objectives and methodology of the research in brief.

Chapter II:

Methodological frameworks

The chapter discusses the researcher's theoretical strategies in detail.

The thesis speculates various cultural reasons and underlying social dynamics of this proliferation of mythological novels in contemporary times by eclectically drawing upon ideas from the number of theorists and critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee, Partha Chatterjee, Pavan Varma, Anthony Giddens, Andre Lefevere, Yuri Lotman as

well as Levi-Strauss Roland Barthes and Fredric Jameson. By combining the various analytical perspectives like Postmodernism, Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies, and Cultural Semiotics regarding globalization and identity, the chapter elaborates the various approaches for analyzing contemporary mythological novels and for exploring this global phenomenon of resurgence of myth in present century India.

The thesis considers the resurgence of mythological novels in contemporary times as a direct result of the impact of globalization. Poetics and ideology of the readership that influences the mythological novels is influenced by globalization.

Globalization created a void where India as a nation must be relocated. The phenomena of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation have led to the emergence of what Pavan Varma called 'new Indian middle class' (Varma, 178). This new urban Indian English speaking youth consumes western best sellers of fantasy and thriller as well as mythological and fantasy programmes on television that was privatized and digitized after 1990s. In terms of Meenakshi Mukherjee, there is an anxiety of Indianness among this English speaking community which these mythological novels address. Contemporary mythological novels are Indian counterpart to those western fantasy thrillers and provide space to negotiate their identity at global spheres. Indian myths can be the space - in the spiritual domain - created by this elite class. In terms of Partha Chatterjee, myth becomes an artistic space, a zone, to declare the identity to the modern world produced and patronized from literature of urban middle class.

Myth as Refractions

Contemporary mythological novels in English are refractions in terms of Andre Lefevere from Sanskrit and other Indian languages, folktales or oral traditions. They are translations of the old myths into the language of new media technology. They are

rewritten by imposing various types of poetological, ideological and patronage related constraints.

The theoretical model provided by Soviet semiotician Yuri Lotman provides the mechanism of how Indian myths are refracted and manipulated to get accepted by the new readers during the cultural change in globalization. It provides us the tools like like text-within-text, inverted images, explosion, core-periphery, boundary, self-description, isomorphism, iconic rhetoric, semiosphere etc. to read/ assess contemporary Indian mythological novels in English as means to access and understand/ negotiate identity crisis in the wake of globalization.

Myth as Ideology

The thesis also discusses myth as 'Depoliticized Speech' by Roland Barthes and Jameson's idea of 'Political Unconscious' to explore and analyse contemporary mythological novels.

In the view of Barthes, myth transforms history into nature. A historical reality supplied by the world is processed into natural image of reality by 'myth'. The function ofmyth is to empty out reality by giving things a natural justification. The term 'real' is used in Lacanian context of individual psyche. Myth as meta-language, distort history and removes the possibility to explore its roots. That way, if accessed carefully, myth provides a historical specific ideological vision of the world. Myth, a thoroughly ideological process, works by presenting culturally specific objects and relations as if they were timeless, natural, and thus unquestionable.

In terms of Fredric Jameson, being natural and timeless at one time, myth transforms the culture into saleable image of the culture in the advertisement like form.

Apart from that, in the postmodern society, there is the nostalgia of the sense of the past – to long for utopian society. The retold myths are an attempt to reproduce that glimmering mirage of the past. The fantastic world that these mythological novels project gives the reader satisfaction of fulfils the desire of utopia. But at the same time they alienate him from the dark social realities like an Ideological State Apparatus. Mythological novels are socially symbolic act, symbolically embody social reality and the surface narration usually mediates the unconscious reality of the text's relation with history.

For Jameson, History is like Lacanian 'Real' that can be accessed only in fragments through mediational categories like narratives. It is a need to reconstruct the prior historical or ideological subtext – that is unspoken and unconscious – to bring it to the surface and can be resolved logically.

Chapter III:

Myth as Refraction in Contemporary Indian Fiction in English

The chapter analyses selected contemporary novels that use myth in a prominent way. By using the framework of eclectic approaches drawn from the theories of globalisation, postcolonial studies, translation studies, and semiotics, the contemporary mythological novels are analysed. The major writers studied in this chapter are Amish Tripathi, Ashok K Banker, Chitra Banerjee, Devdutt Pattanaik, Nilanjan P Choudhuri and Anand Neelakantan. The chapter presents a brief introduction to the contemporary writers and their works, opinions based on their interviews and speeches collected from newspaper articles and internet sources like youtube videos, blogs and webs. The chapter also mentions brief survey of the contemporary writers who revived myth in 21stcentury India to demonstrate issues. The

rhetorical tools like isomorphism, text-within-the-text, inverse image, semantic tropes, iconic rhetoric explosion and unpredictability, semiosphere and refraction.

Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* (2010-2013) and Ashok Banker's *Vengeance of Ravana* (2012) are examples of refraction where the old mythology is translated into the modern day language of science and technology. They follow the pattern of same characters and different plots. Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* (2008) is analysed as 'inverted image' and *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* (2010) is modern retelling of the *Mahabharata*. *Bali and the Ocean of Milk* (2011) by Nilanjan Choudhury tells the story of Samudra-Manthan in modern day language. Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) narrated from Draupadi's point of view and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* (2012) written from the perspective of Ravana are 'myth about myth' - 'text within a text' and 'isomorphic' to their core-texts in the globalised Indian semiosphere.

Chapter IV:

Myth as Ideology in Contemporary Indian Fiction in English.

The chapter analyses the novels in terms of political unconscious and depoliticised speech in their social and cultural contexts.

Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* reveals ideology of power and manipulation. Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Pregnant King* (2008) also talks about gender issues and reiterates such problems in the society. *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* (2010) depoliticises certain myths in modern context. Ashok Banker's *The Vengeance of Ravana* is a tale of ideology of Dharma. *Bali and the Ocean of Milk* (2011) by Nilanjan Choudhury is an example of Deva's cheating on Asuras an indirect demeaning

of Deva ideology and customs. Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* (2012) expose the ideology of dominant class regarding caste and gender. These novels evidently describe the long for utopia and ideological function of myth. They are already demystified reveal the reality of the society in their political unconscious.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The chapter concludes the main argument of the thesis with reference to above chapters. Globalisation has created certain kind of cultural identity crisis among English speaking elite class in India. This class regularly consumes the western bestsellers and fantasy fiction need an Indian counterpart. The proliferation of mythological novels which address the cultural identity crisis is the direct result of globalisation process. Old myths when translated into the language of global media and technology provide Indian analogue of the western best sellers. They are refractions in Lefevere's term. When read as refractions, these myth narratives attempt resolve the identity crisis by creating a space for English speaking cosmopolitan elite class to locate themselves in globalised Indian semiosphere. Semiotics of culture provides mechanism to analyse contemporary mythological novels. Thus, the anxiety of Indian identity in the era of globalization renders a valid answer to the resurgence of Indian myths in Indian fiction in English.

Myth becomes consumable commodity in the era of global late capitalism. When studied closely, they demystify historical and cultural reality that is modified by its ideological function. When read as Romances or Magical narratives, these mythological novels reveals the text's relation with history which they symbolically

embody. They are the carrier of deeper anxiety and conflicts within the text that can be accessed in Political Unconscious.