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Two Sides of the Same Coin: Postcolonial Elements and Indian Mythological Fiction

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Abstract

Postcolonial studies seek to revise past understandings, as well as to negotiate with and subvert ideologies and representations that have instilled epistemological impact in the masses. The purpose of this article is to identify this goal in the chosen Mythological fiction in order to imbibe pivotal characteristic traits that trigger the opening of various dimensions to investigate. Literary and cultural tenets have experienced tremendous resistance and reversal in the meanings they once held. The stories of wisdom from our cultural heritage, which are also a key element of this article, have undergone and continue to undergo this churning process. Narrow, rigid positions define most debates in this age of moral certainty. In the light of postcolonial theory, the possibility remains that the mythological tales may contain content that has been moulded, misinterpreted, or misunderstood. The article emphasises that contemporary fiction based on Indian Mythology that is redefined, reanalysed, or recreated in order to discover a world of moral haziness and uncertainty is more similar to our experience as ordinary humans.

Keywords: Indian Mythological Fiction, Culture, Postcolonialism, Perspectives, Revisiting.

Introduction

"With myth, everything becomes possible," observed Claude Lévi-Strauss, a statement that reflects how literature and cultural dogmas have undergone significant modes of resistance and reversal in the meanings they once held. The tales of wisdom from our cultural

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heritage, the key area element of the present article too, have undergone and continue to be, in this churning process. Mythological fictions, the latest vogue, are tales of marvel, delight, and imagination from the realms of Indian Mythology and folklore. The settings mostly stand the same, but evoke varied perspectives. While certain fiction dwells on retellings of *the Mahabharata* and *the Ramayana*, other fiction entails historical and cultural dislocation.

Postcolonial study aims to revise past understandings and to negotiate with and subvert ideologies and representations that have had an epistemological impact on the masses. The article aims to identify this objective while focusing on Indian Mythological fiction to imbibe pivotal characteristic traits that open various dimensions for probing. The article mainly aims to focus on the following aspects:

1. Postcolonial grounds
2. Modern view to accept and a counterargument to the accepted with a certain amount of clarity

The article emphasizes that contemporary fiction based on Indian Mythology, which may be redefined, reanalysed, or recreated to explore a world of moral haziness and uncertainty, is closer to our experience as ordinary human beings. The narrow and rigid positions define most debates in this fundamentalist age of moral certainty: moulded- mistook –misunderstood in the light of postcolonial pursuit. Eclectic tracing of the term colonialism that hinders a fuller understanding is given ample coverage.

As the term 'postcolonial' suggests, the formerly colonized people seek to revisit and re-investigate the impact of colonisation before committing it to collective memory. In a more specifically literary section, texts are read as mythopoeia, foregrounding the aesthetic and poetic issues in colonial and postcolonial poems and novels (Andre and Raimbault).

Actively engage with the process of de-colonisation in what is occurring at a recent pace. It is a fast-expanding field of study with an immense scope to redirect and reconstruct ideas. Trying to understand the meaning of the term 'postcolonialism' in depth is a challenge, primarily because it has been interpreted in various ways over the past few decades.

1. Postcolonialism and Postcolonial Criticism (1990 - present)

Historians first used the term after the Second World War to refer to the post-independence period. It is "an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to the study of European colonialism and its impact on the society, culture, history and politics of the formerly colonised regions such as the African continent, the Caribbean, the Middle East, South Asia and the Pacific" (Cuddon 550).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the groundbreaking book on post-colonisation. The book has its own terminology. It illustrates the imbalance between the West and the East by highlighting the West's supremacy over the East. Said used terms and theories such as "Orient and the Occident" to show the relationship between two different cultures: "East and West" (Said 2).

Homi Bhabha further shaped the theory in his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture.* He has advanced the theory of "hybridity" (Bhabha 1994), which redefines the vision of postcolonial theory, holding that all cultures come together in each other and cannot be separated. He also remarks that the postcolonial aftermath is not limited to literature but has its roots in socio-cultural, political, national, and economic studies, for it holds "system of address" (Bhabha 109). He also raised the question of cultural identity by using the term 'mimicry' to point out westernisation of native culture (Bhabha 44).

There is a dispute over whether the term must designate writing about, or written after, the colonisation as Post colonialism, or whether it is beyond, signifying the overt opposition and resistance to oppression due to race, culture, or even thoughts, as post colonialism (without a hyphen). Bill Ashcroft implied:

> "Thus, the term was a potential site of disciplinary and interpretative contestation almost from the beginning, especially the implications involved in the signifying hyphen or its absence. The heavily poststructuralist influence of the major exponents of colonial discourse theory, Said (Foucault), Homi Bhabha (Althusser and Lacan) and Gayatri Spivak (Derrida), led many critics, concerned to focus on the material effects of the historical condition of colonialism, as well as on its discursive power, to insist on the hyphen to distinguish postcolonial studies as a field from colonial discourse theory per se, which formed only one aspect of the many approaches and interests that the term 'postcolonial' sought to embrace and discuss" (Ashcroft).

a. Issue of identity, including personal and cultural relationships

The anti-colonial reflection is the latest and chief element that adds to the theory, originating in South Asia and Africa. Politics and justice are what are perpetrated on, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. This intends that it has taken a variety of forms: it has been interested in political and aesthetic representations; it has been committed to accounting for globalisation and global modernity; "it has been invested in reimagining politics and ethics" from beneath "imperial power, an effort" that continues to benefit those who continue to suffer its consequences; and it "has been interested in perpetually discovering and theorising new forms of human injustice, from environmentalism to human rights" (Elam).

In the mid-twentieth century; post colonialism emerged as a critical literary theory. The focus was on studying colonized people and their condition as a subjective theme. The literature created by the countries that were colonised was already a matter of prime study under the theoretical lens. Soon, the term expanded to a wide array of meanings. Helen Gilbert states: "In many contexts, the term indicates a degree of agency, or at least a program of resistance, against cultural domination; in others, it signals the existence of a particular historical legacy and/ or a chronological stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation" (Gilbert). Basically, the power that gets highlighted in most definitions is culture.

The word, however, has a wide array of outlooks on cultural, economic, historical, political, and sociological disciplines to analyse. The primary aim of this article is to focus on the cultural dimension, as features of society and culture, and the scope of alteration in outlook from the time of colonization to the present is a key characteristic of postcolonialism.

b. A distinctive perspective

Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of resistance to an imitation. It holds the concept of resistance and carries ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality, etc., which may not have been held, or held in the same way, in the colonized culture's view of humankind. It specifies continuity, change, and liberation from the subjugations undergone in the forms of caste, gender, or race.

For example, nowadays (in Indian literature), myth is being unbottled from the genre of mythology and sharing space with fiction, which is indeed a poignant change. C. Kerenyi, in the *Prolegomena* section of *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, states:

> If we want to promote real knowledge of mythology, we must not appeal at the outset to theoretical considerations and judgments. Neither should we talk over much of 'sources'. The water must be fetched and drunk fresh from the spring if it is to flow through us and quicken our hidden mythological talents. (Kerenyi and Jung 6)

The thought from whomsoever myths came down may not be traceable, surely though, clarity remains in the mind of the receiver.

The mythic tales, transformed into mytho-fiction, render the share of environmental, societal, traditional, cultural, and individual contributions, adding more to interpretations and understanding, and reflecting their affinity to postcolonial traits. Culture is the guiding and interactive connection, including language, customs, values, symbols, beliefs, materials, and knowledge, that shapes ideas passed down through generations to subsequent societies. Values are shared judgments, desirable or not, right or wrong. In *Our Social World: Introduction to Sociology*, culture is stated as "ongoing and cumulative because individuals and societies continually build on existing culture to adopt new challenges and opportunities.... The transmission of culture is the feature that most separates from other animals" (Ballantine and Roberts 77). The mythic tales, transformed into mytho-fiction, render the share of environmental, societal, traditional, cultural, and individual contributions, adding more to interpretations and understanding, and reflecting their affinity to postcolonial traits.

c) Authority, Dominion and Literature

Ambiguities, sometimes vagueness, and, mostly, cultural negation implied beyond the time point are the focus elements in the theory of post colonialism. Being a multicultural approach, it is transnational in nature, offering a heterogeneous frame of reference. Mukherjee states, "Postcolonial literature is presumably free from such centralist undertones, it suggests de-centring, plurality, hybridity, a dismantling authority – hence in many ways it is an enabling and protean term" (Mukherjee 6). When we observe the mythological fiction through individual character portrayal, it offers a

deconstructed view of every aspect. When observing mythic tales, we tend to ignore that humans are a bag of mixed emotions. The characteristic features attributed to every character will always reflect perspective bias.

d) Relationship between literature criticism and Mythic theme

The ability of literature to obscure, mould, or ornament the content can harness the claim of reliability. The article, *History: The Truth Often Lies*, quotes the statement by Winston Churchill, "History is written by the Victors' to affirm the capability of historical literature to disparage or glorify anyone (Sanghi). As put by Stephen Slemon:

> Colonialism, obviously, is an enormously problematic category: it is by definition transhistorical and unspecific, and it is used in relation to very different kinds of historical oppression and economic control. [Nevertheless], like the term 'patriarchy', which shares similar problems in definition, the concept of colonialism . . . remains crucial to a critique of past and present power relations in world affairs. (Slemon)

This brings to the point that any oppression, whether it be of colonisation by other countries or from the people of their own country, can be categorised in post colonialism. Whether mythic tales speak from the coloniser's point of view or are a reactionary voice clad in metaphors becomes a concern for conceiving our attention as a potential outcome for postcolonial studies.

Mythic stories, considered sacred, tales, or fiction, are relevant today as they were in ancient times, as the text and context can be approached from several angles. Also, the textual, actual, and understood contexts can align across variations. The real task is to take the best aspect that can trigger the time at which it is read or interpreted.

e) Mythic tales as an allegorical or explicit representation of colonial oppression

Postcolonial theory primarily focuses on the political, economic, historical, aesthetic, and social effects of colonial rule across the world in the 18th through the 20th centuries. The theory draws on various outlooks and interventions. However, all share the common claim that the world we reside in is difficult to apprehend without relating it to the history of imperialism and colonial rule. The colonised world deeply influences our innate thoughts. The theory

concerns the lingering forms of colonial authority even after the end of the Colonial Empire.

f) Characters, theme, and inference of the canonised work as reflected in the text

Postcolonial theory has shaped our thinking about the historical and political implications of the texts, both national and international. It embodies the critical humanistic interrogation in both scholastic and real-life applications. Operations of cultural difference related to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural beliefs of individuals contribute to shaping our perceptions of ourselves, the characters, and the system we live in.

Indian writing in English churns with certain bandied contexts like authenticity, superficiality, creativity, imitation, parochialism, elitism, and so on, to mention a few, which are rooted in colonialism by its own system. Most often, in Indian literature, writers engrave the sufferings of the underprivileged and add voice to the downtrodden, thereby contributing to the stream of understanding of the social and cultural scenario of our nation. Eminent writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Hanif Kureishi, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai have advanced postcolonial themes in their works.

The art of storytelling has always stood as a prime medium for effective communication. It acts as a bonding point for a diverse cultural system. The connection is immediate, so is the acceptance. The major motif of myth is to give shape and significance to the contemporary fragmented reality.

Conclusion

The only requirement for consideration is the mind's acceptance, with varied facet implications, which plays a role. Various instances, especially in mythic tales, evoke understanding and realization of men and manners, regardless of the system one is engaged with, thereby increasing a sense of belonging. The mytho-fiction genre takes one to a space where the old wine in a new bottle image sneaks in, and one can broaden one's perspective on all that we have thought we do know.

The use of myth plays a significant role in identifying and correlating the old understanding and wisdom with the new meaning of human existence. They also portray a fresh dimension of existence through adaptations, digressions, and re-rendering of the mythic tales. These tales act as conduits for new emissions, through which old ideas are either regenerated or the metaphorical aspects are given wings of creativity to head towards the springs of new meanings that suit the contemporary period. Hence, myths are treasure troves from which lessons of life are drawn and will continue to be drawn.

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