

MYTH AND HISTORY

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Myths are created by people to empower the hegemony or resist it. The consciousness of the nation is formed by ancient myths as well modern myths. The history is erased, rewritten, distorted, subverted by the colonizers and our writers are rewriting or recreating it and restoring public memory. The complete and true history will never be revealed but fraudulent versions will be certainly uncovered.

Literature is related to all disciplines of life. Literature, history and myth are related to and dependent on each other. They together create identity, culture and ideology of nation. They influence each other. The tools developed to analyse one discipline can be applied to other. The interchangeability of the theories developed in the field of literature, sociology, historiography, anthropology, psychology, mythology is proof of this interdependence. Therefore inter disciplinary approach is needed in the study of myths in literature. The use of specific and well-known myths, mythical patterns and narrative strategies show the creative process of new myths. What historians write may be the partial truth, but fiction writer can capture the truth left behind by the historian. This process may be denoted as "fictionalizing the history" because crafted myths have ability to falsify or fictionalize or propagate history.

Myth is symbolic way of representing truth. History relies on facts and events and has many interpretations. In order to understand the present we need to understand the past. Historian cannot merely account the facts, but has to write like a fiction writer - a narrative. According to Eric Gould, there is ontological gap between event and meaning. Historian has to fill this gap - most of the time with myths. The debate between factual truth - history and imagined truth - literature has been very old. Michel Foucault challenged the concept of history. He argued that historians cannot tell *the history* but only *a history*. He states that history as we read today is not definite version of History, but it is merely agreement on interpretation of figurative codes which are earlier recorded. This agreement depends upon the accepted norms of the age of history. It is cultural encodation. Therefore Historian's version of history is dependent on the language and narrative form.

'There can be myth without an ontological gap between event and meaning. A myth intends to a tautology Myth is both hypothesis and compromise. Its meaning is perpetually open and universal only because once the absence of final meaning is recognized, the gap itself demands interpretation, which in turn must go on and on, for language is nothing if it is not system of open meaning.' (Gould, 1981)

Early societies of human beings had myths and these myths form earlier history most of the early history and myths form in oral tradition of those societies for early societies, myth was the medium to express the undiscovered and unknown truth in symbolic form, the other hand, modern societies deliberately created and used myths to influence and shaper events. During last two centuries colonizers and empire builders circulated certain myths as Promised Land and Chosen People which in turn changed the course of history. This can be observed in events like creation of the state of Israel, partition of India or the slaves going back to Africa. Similarly there is lot space to say that Aryan invasion is a myth propagated by western philosophers and thinkers.

Myth is source of literature and history. The earliest myth stories came out as the explanation to controlling forces of unseen powers of nature. Another way of myth creation was analogical tales evolving the codes of behavior in order to solve social conflicts. Myth and history are both interpretative processes encoded in language. Language is open-ended and therefore, further interpretations of myth and history are possible. Myth, as encoded in language holds the characteristics of literature and gains its status. Myth

as it has originated as a result of interaction between the unknown and an individual; it becomes interaction between myth-text and the individual. In short it becomes a dialogue between listener and speaker. Thus, myth turns out as a system of structures and linguistic theories can be applied to it. Similarly as myth is literature, literary theories can be applied to it. Myths from primitive times are passed from generations to generations orally and become racial memory.

In the process of expansion of humanity, myths dispersed geographically, resulting in variants and enlargement of myths. Myths underwent the process of modifications, amplifications etc. Modern novelist always tries to give in dimension to old myths. He may point out the relevance to myth to contemporary social conditions or he may demystify the social issues. The modern novelists also depend on myths for the purpose of satire, allusion, parody, allegory and produce different levels of meanings. Myth has itself different meanings as well used in different paradigms. He gives new perspectives to old myths. The source for literary creation is material available in all fields of knowledge. He uses structures and patterns from myth and innovates new story different from facts, truth and history.

Myth is so encyclopedic a term that it means everything or nothing. We can find in myth whatever we want to say is essential about the way humans try to interpret their place on earth. Myth is a synthesizer of values which uniquely manages to mean most things to most men. It is allegory and tautology, reason and unreason, logic and fantasy, waking thought and dream, temporary and the permanent, archetype and metaphor, origin and end. (Gould 1981) Thus, myth carries to opposite meanings simultaneously. We have myths in every field of life - true and false at a time. When we define myth, we focus on its theme, form, structure, fiction, or meaning. In a sense we are analyzing myth as a literary piece / text. Finally we are considering myth as a literature. Both myth and literature are about the life, truth, values and narrator. They are concerned with timeless aspects of life as life and death, cosmic significance of life, nature of life and interpersonal relationships. In '*Tradition and Individual Talent*,' T. S. Eliot mentions tradition of literature and historical sense. Eliot is mentioning the existence of any text in relation to history of literature from the pre-historic period - mythic age. Historicity of the text means its relation to the previous texts, in terms by themes, patterns, techniques, characters, form. We can find substantial similarities between myths and modern literary texts in this regard. By the use of myths, writer tries to redefine myths, the past as well as present. Barthes argues that myths are all encompassing by its nature. Literature and myth likewise takes its reader to the truth which is not necessarily being fact. Myths gave birth to literature and they exist today in form, theme and technique of modern literature. We can trace the origins of literary forms back in myths. Western writers used it to impose their superiority, and others to revive their identity damaged by colonial rulers.

Not necessarily writers make direct use of myths through characters or themes but they can rely on particular patterns found in mythological stories. Even analogy, association or imagery may be used to suggest parallel. The struggle between good and evil and the associated opposite forces are themes in literature and myth. Joseph Campbell identifies betrayal, punishment, exile, discovery, test challenge, as mythical patterns.

The history of Middle East Asia is shaped by the powerful motif of 'Promised Land' - Israel. There are numerous figures across the globe in all times creating such myths. There is mythical unconscious which had led to the process which made political and social leaders legends and heroes.

Campbell states that the function of myth is to carry the energies of archetype instinct system into fruitful play in a contemporary space-time daylight situation'. (*Myths we live by* Campbell, 1973). The notion of archetype is used by Frye as a tool of literary analysis. In his '*The Anatomy of Criticism*', he defines archetypal approach to literary criticism. He says that study of conventions in literature leads to the study of genres. A poem is not just imitation of nature but also imitation of other poems. Thus, what shapes it into poem is its form. 'Literature shapes itself, and is not shaped externally: the forms of literature can no more exist outside literature than the forms of sonata and fugue and rondo can exist outside music'. (Frye,

1973). What Frye points out here is in the same line of Hayden Writes '*prefiguring*', and T. S. Eliot's view of '*tradition*.' Our literary experience is further unified and integrated through the connection between poems by its use of symbols and images. Thus, the meaning of the text goes beyond the text to the associative power by reader's mind. The author deliberately uses either allusions or myths to achieve this effect. Archetypes are associative chesters and differ from signs in being complex variables. Within the complexity are often a large number of learned associations which are communicable because a large number of people in given culture happen to be familiar with them.' (Frye, 1973) Reading of text is creative activity where participation of reader is necessary with common shared knowledge between writer and reader. Frye divides the development of literature into four phases, literal, formal, mythical and analogical. He states that 'analogically, then, poetry unites total ritual, or unlimited social action with total dream, or unlimited individual thought. Its universe is infinite and boundless hypothesis (Frye, 1973). Frye here underline the assumption that literature begins with myth and develops into different modes. According to Frye, archetypal perspective is the process of manufacturing human forms out by nature. The changes in these forms show the progress or development is civilization. 'An archetypal symbol is usually a natural object with a human meaning and it forms critical view of art as a civilized product, a vision of goals of human work. (Frye 1973)

According to Sigmund Freud, myths are of the psychological order of the dreams, myths are public dreams and dreams are private myths. They are outcome of childhood repressions and disappointments. Jung on the other hand, elevates this view to more importance and says that myths bring us back to those sub conscious forces. "The content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes Which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of collective unconscious, indicate the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere and does not develop individually but has to be inherited." (Jung) The archetypes are pre-forms, pre thought systems of readiness of action but not the action themselves. The archetypal symbol is imagery generated and regulated archetype in itself is invisible. It is an innate predisposition that may be inherent part of an individual. The archetype stimulates the mind of individual to make vast variety of images. They tell us in symbols and picture language of the power of the psyche. Myths represent the wisdom of races. "The Society that cherishes and keeps its myths alive will be nourished from soundest, richest strata of human life" (Campbell 1973).

The characteristic feature of myth and literature is that it is deeply rooted in life and extended in different directions for different purposes. Literature and myth are both systems with many subsystems. Myth is system of literature and literature is system within myth. They are interactive as well interdependent, sustain on each other, making them meta language systems. Roland Barthes says that myth is type of speech, it is not a concept, idea or object but mode of signification. He further says that anything can be appropriated for the use of myth for certain period, and later its mythical signification is lost. Therefore myths are not eternal. Myth uses already worked material and creates second order of meaning which is accepted by social convention. Myths cannot be defined by the object of its message, not by the material it uses language system to emerge as literature system and reach out to unknown. Jaques Derrida in his essay '*Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*' says, 'There is no unity or obsolete source of myth. The focus or the source of myth is always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable and non-existent in the first place. Everything begins with figuration and relationship.' (Seturaman ed. 1989).

Myth constitutes the history of the acts of supernatural, and this history is considered to be true and factual. Myth describes the process of creation or how something came into existence - the pattern of behavior. Therefore, it constitutes the paradigms for all human acts. With the knowledge of myths, the knowledge of the origin of various things is acquired. One can control and manipulate these myths with the help of this knowledge. This knowledge is not abstract, but comes along with the ritual, which in turn is the justification for this myth. Thus almost every human being lives the myth, recollects it and also re-enacts it.

Myths reveal that the world, man and life have supernatural origin and history, and that this history is significant, precious and exemplary.

Myths, when studied alive, are not the explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest but narrative insurrection of primeval reality told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function, or expression, enhancement and decoding of beliefs, safeguarding and enforcement of morality and setting the rules for guidance of man. Thus myth is vital ingredient of human civilization. Myth is not idle tale, but ever working force. It is not an intellectual explanation but pragmatics of primitive faith and moral wisdom. For the native people, their myths are statements of greater and relevant reality which determine their present activities.

Myth always has been an integral part of literature, and myth and mythology is always remarkable and constant interest of writers and poets in all languages and cultures. Established myths may be interpreted dogmatically or allegorically in various ways. Myth rendered in the conceptual language cannot serve the full equivalent of its meaning. In the course of time myths are told and retold, modified, elaborated, abridged; and its life is always poetic life of the story. When the myth loses all connectivity with belief system, it becomes purely literature - as classical myths became pure literary myths during Christian era. This happened only because myth in itself carried the characteristics of literature. Literature is more flexible than myth. A writer may work in area of human life away from the shadow of mythology, but mythology merges with and into literature.

The perceptions of myth and archetype have been resurrected as per their natural spontaneity, collectivity and universality. Myth criticism emerged in west after Carl Jung's 'Depth Psychology' and primordial images' and Maud Baudkin's "Archetypal Patterns in Poetry" (1934). Through his 'The Anatomy of Criticism' (1957), Northrop Frye substituted these views. What Frye suggested was the idea of the presence of underlying mythical patterns in all kind of literature and considered that imaginative literature is articulation of essential mythic formulas and archetypes. Roland Barthes through his *Mythologies* (1973) presented the idea of myth and archetypes as being subconscious language and system of signs. Furthermore, Levi - Strauss in *Myth and Meaning* (1978) presented myth as a kind of thought, halfway between precepts and concepts.

The interdisciplinary approach needs fresh interpretation and presentation of myth and archetypes regarding their use in literature. James Frazer, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, others tried to explain the process of myth construction, revitalization of myths, reappearance, retelling and reinterpretation of myths as a process of multidimensional continuity. There are scholastic interrogations on the existence of myths and archetypes in our literatures in Indian languages. The approach aims at literary analysis to explore and synthesize between the universal and particular (myth and literary text), an attempt to locate modern man and society in the spectrum of eternal time and space.

We need to notice the difference between west and India. Unlike west, myths and mythology in India is intrinsically woven into the socio-cultural fabric, and holds the capacity of multidimensional reformation and reinterpretation complexities. Factually, western critical parameters are not necessarily relevant to appreciation of Indian literature.

Every civilization on earth has its own myths and mythology - narratives of myths - limited to the people of that civilization. This mythology is sufficient source for the explanation to the mysteries of those people. As myths survived in the form of stories / narratives they got transmitted to next transmitted to next generations. Some of the great civilizations of the world witnessed the age in which the civilization prospered in all manners and myths become rituals - a practice by people and thus became part of the culture. Thus came festivals and various traditions circling around myths. The biggest reasons for the survival of myth was the inclusion of myth in the finest creation of human being - literature. Creation of human being - literature. Ancient Greek and Indian writings are revolving around myths.

References:

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