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## Reinterpretation of Indian Myths in Indian English Fiction

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18667360>

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### 1. Abstract

Myth has remained a fundamental element of Indian cultural and literary expression, offering a rich repository of symbols, narratives, and archetypes. In Indian English fiction, myths are not merely retold in their traditional forms but are frequently reinterpreted to reflect contemporary social, cultural, and psychological realities. This study aims to examine the reinterpretation of Indian myths in Indian English fiction and to analyze the ways in which writers transform traditional mythological narratives into modern literary expressions.

The paper adopts a critical and textual approach to explore how myths drawn from epics, puranic traditions, and folklore are reshaped within the framework of the modern novel. Rather than viewing myth as a static or religious construct, the study treats it as a dynamic literary strategy that enables writers to engage with issues of identity, gender, power, and cultural change.

The scope of the study includes an examination of different modes of mythic reinterpretation, such as social, gendered, and psychological rewriting. It also considers the broader literary significance of myth reinterpretation in shaping the distinctive character of Indian English fiction. The study concludes that the reinterpretation of Indian myths enriches contemporary fiction by providing symbolic depth, cultural continuity, and critical insight into modern experience.

### 2. Keywords

Myth, Reinterpretation, Indian English Fiction, Cultural Identity, Narrative Strategy

### 3. Introduction

Myth has occupied a central place in Indian culture as a source of collective memory, ethical reflection, and imaginative expression. Rooted in ancient epics, puranic narratives, and oral traditions, Indian myths have shaped social values, cultural identity, and modes of understanding human existence. These myths have never remained static; they have evolved

through retellings, adaptations, and reinterpretations across regions, languages, and historical contexts. As a result, myth in the Indian tradition functions not merely as sacred narrative but as a living cultural framework that continues to inform thought and creativity.

In Indian English fiction, the reinterpretation of myths has emerged as a significant literary trend. Writing in a modern genre and a colonial language, Indian English novelists often face the challenge of articulating indigenous experiences within contemporary narrative forms. Myth provides a powerful resource to address this challenge. By reworking familiar mythological narratives, writers are able to assert cultural rootedness while simultaneously engaging with modern social realities. Reinterpretation allows myths to be freed from rigid traditional meanings and reshaped to reflect changing concerns related to identity, gender, power, and cultural transformation.

The growing tendency to reinterpret myths also reflects the changing role of literature in society. Contemporary Indian English fiction frequently questions established hierarchies, dominant ideologies, and inherited values. Mythical narratives, when revisited from new perspectives, become effective tools for critique as well as continuity. Writers do not simply reproduce myths but interrogate them, highlighting marginalized voices and alternative interpretations that were often suppressed in canonical versions.

The study of reinterpretation of Indian myths in Indian English fiction is therefore relevant for understanding how tradition and modernity interact within literary discourse. By examining the creative transformation of myths in contemporary narratives, this study seeks to explore how Indian English writers use myth as a dynamic literary strategy to engage with present-day concerns while remaining connected to cultural heritage.

#### **4. Concept of Myth and Reinterpretation**

In literary studies, myth is understood as a traditional narrative that embodies the collective beliefs, values, and worldviews of a culture. Myths are not confined to religious doctrine or legendary storytelling; rather, they function as symbolic structures through which societies interpret fundamental questions of existence, morality, power, and identity. In the Indian context, myths drawn from epics, puranic traditions, and folklore have served as enduring cultural codes, transmitting ethical ideals and social norms across generations. As literary material, myth provides archetypal patterns, recurring motifs, and symbolic imagery that allow writers to represent human experience in a condensed and meaningful form.

The literary significance of myth lies in its symbolic and cultural flexibility. Myths operate beyond historical specificity and factual accuracy, enabling them to address universal concerns

while remaining rooted in particular cultural traditions. In literature, myth often acts as a bridge between the individual and the collective, linking personal narratives to shared cultural memory. This symbolic capacity makes myth a powerful tool for writers seeking to explore complex social and psychological realities that cannot be fully expressed through realism alone. Reinterpretation, in literary terms, refers to the creative process by which traditional narratives are revisited, revised, and reimagined within new contexts. Rather than preserving myths in their original or canonical forms, reinterpretation involves questioning established meanings and reshaping them to reflect contemporary perspectives. This process allows writers to engage critically with tradition, highlighting alternative viewpoints and previously marginalized voices.

In Indian English fiction, reinterpretation transforms myth into a dynamic literary strategy. Through reinterpretation, myths acquire new meanings that resonate with modern social, political, and psychological concerns. Thus, reinterpretation does not negate the cultural value of myth but revitalizes it, ensuring its continued relevance within changing literary and cultural landscapes.

#### 5. Indian Myths as Literary Sources

Indian myths have long served as a rich and versatile source for literary creation, offering a vast range of narratives, characters, and symbolic frameworks. Epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, along with puranic narratives and regional mythological traditions, provide Indian English writers with material that is deeply embedded in cultural memory. These mythic texts contain complex stories of duty, power, exile, sacrifice, and moral conflict, making them highly adaptable to literary reinterpretation within the modern novel.

The symbolic richness of Indian myths lies in their layered meanings and archetypal characters. Mythological figures often embody multiple dimensions of human experience, allowing writers to draw upon them as representations of ethical dilemmas, social roles, and psychological states. When incorporated into Indian English fiction, these figures are frequently reimagined in ways that reflect contemporary realities. Myth thus becomes a flexible narrative resource rather than a fixed religious inheritance, enabling writers to explore modern concerns through familiar cultural symbols.

Indian epics and puranic stories also offer narrative structures that differ from Western realist traditions. Cyclical time, multiple perspectives, and interwoven sub-narratives found in mythological texts influence the form and technique of Indian English novels. Writers adapt these structures to challenge linear storytelling and to create narratives that reflect the

complexity of Indian social and cultural life. This structural adaptability enhances the creative potential of myth as a literary source.

By drawing on Indian myths as literary sources, Indian English novelists establish a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Myths provide continuity with the past while allowing space for innovation and critique. Their enduring symbolic power and narrative flexibility make them an essential foundation for creative expression in Indian English fiction.

## **6. Modes of Reinterpretation in Indian English Fiction**

The reinterpretation of Indian myths in Indian English fiction takes place through multiple creative modes that allow writers to connect ancient narratives with contemporary realities. Rather than retelling myths in their traditional forms, novelists reshape them to reflect changing social structures, gender relations, and psychological concerns. These modes of reinterpretation reveal how myth functions as a flexible literary strategy capable of responding to modern experiences while retaining its symbolic depth.

### **6.1 Myth in Modern Social Contexts**

One significant mode of reinterpretation involves placing myths within modern social contexts to address issues such as social change, class divisions, and cultural transformation. Indian English novelists often draw parallels between mythological conflicts and contemporary social realities, using familiar narratives to critique existing social structures. Through this process, myths become tools for examining inequalities, power relations, and tensions between tradition and progress.

By reworking myths in modern settings, writers highlight the continuity between past and present forms of social struggle. Mythological stories of exile, conflict, or moral duty are adapted to reflect present-day experiences of marginalization, displacement, or cultural negotiation. This social reinterpretation allows myths to function as frameworks through which broader societal transformations can be understood, making ancient narratives relevant to modern readers.

### **6.2 Gendered Reinterpretation of Myths**

Gendered reinterpretation represents a crucial mode through which Indian English fiction engages critically with myth. Traditional myths have often been shaped by patriarchal values, assigning fixed roles to male and female figures. Contemporary writers revisit these narratives to question such representations and to foreground alternative perspectives, particularly those of women and marginalized characters.

Through gendered reinterpretation, mythological female figures are reimagined with greater agency, voice, and psychological depth. Writers challenge traditional gender hierarchies by

exposing the silences and exclusions embedded in canonical versions of myths. This process transforms myth into a space of resistance, allowing Indian English fiction to address issues of gender inequality, power, and identity while reshaping inherited cultural narratives.

### **6.3 Myth and Psychological Rewriting**

Another important mode of reinterpretation involves the psychological rewriting of myth. In this approach, mythological journeys, trials, and transformations are adapted to represent inner conflict, identity crises, and processes of self-discovery. Myths are no longer treated solely as external narratives but as symbolic representations of the human psyche.

Psychological reinterpretation enables writers to explore the inner lives of characters by drawing on archetypal patterns found in myth. Themes of quest, exile, and transformation are reworked to reflect personal struggles with alienation, moral uncertainty, and the search for meaning. Through this mode, myth becomes a powerful metaphor for psychological experience, allowing Indian English fiction to articulate the complexities of modern subjectivity while remaining rooted in cultural tradition.

## **7. Myth, History, and Cultural Identity**

In Indian English fiction, myth often functions as a means of reconstructing history and negotiating questions of cultural identity. Unlike conventional historical narratives that rely on linear chronology and documented facts, myth offers an alternative mode of engaging with the past. By blending myth with history, writers are able to explore historical experiences not merely as recorded events but as lived realities shaped by memory, imagination, and cultural consciousness. Myth thus allows fiction to represent history in symbolic and interpretive ways. The use of myth in reconstructing history enables writers to question dominant or official historical accounts. Myths provide narrative frameworks through which suppressed voices, marginalized experiences, and alternative perspectives can be brought into focus. By reworking mythological narratives alongside historical contexts, Indian English novelists challenge fixed interpretations of the past and reveal history as a contested and layered construct. This approach highlights the continuity between ancient narratives and modern historical experiences, suggesting that cultural memory often operates through mythic patterns.

Myth also plays a crucial role in negotiating cultural identity, particularly in a postcolonial context. Indian English fiction frequently reflects tensions between indigenous traditions and external influences. Myth serves as a cultural anchor that connects characters and communities to shared traditions and collective memory. Through myth, writers assert cultural specificity

while engaging with global literary forms, thereby negotiating hybrid identities shaped by both tradition and modernity.

In this sense, myth becomes a medium through which cultural identity is continually redefined. By integrating myth with history, Indian English fiction presents identity as dynamic rather than fixed, rooted in the past yet responsive to present realities. This interplay of myth, history, and identity underscores the enduring relevance of myth as a cultural and literary force in shaping narratives of belonging and self-understanding.

#### **8. Critical Perspectives on Myth Reinterpretation**

The reinterpretation of myth in Indian English fiction has been widely recognized as a powerful creative strategy that expands the thematic and formal possibilities of the novel. From a critical perspective, myth reinterpretation allows writers to move beyond conventional realism and engage with symbolic, philosophical, and cultural dimensions of experience. By revisiting familiar mythological narratives, authors can address contemporary concerns while maintaining a dialogue with tradition. This approach enriches Indian English fiction with layered meanings and reinforces its cultural distinctiveness.

One of the major creative possibilities of myth reinterpretation lies in its flexibility. Myths, when reimagined, can be adapted to diverse contexts such as social critique, gender discourse, and psychological exploration. Reinterpretation enables writers to question dominant ideologies embedded in traditional myths and to foreground marginalized perspectives. Critics often view this process as an act of cultural negotiation, through which inherited narratives are reshaped to reflect changing values and realities. In this sense, myth reinterpretation becomes both a literary and a political act.

However, critical evaluations also point to certain limitations. Excessive reliance on myth may risk reducing narrative originality if reinterpretation becomes predictable or overly allegorical. There is also the possibility that myth-based narratives may alienate readers who lack familiarity with the cultural references involved. Furthermore, uncritical adaptation of myths can inadvertently reinforce traditional hierarchies or nostalgic views of the past, undermining the transformative potential of reinterpretation.

Despite these limitations, critical discourse generally acknowledges the enduring value of myth reinterpretation in Indian English fiction. When employed with critical awareness and artistic balance, reinterpretation revitalizes myth, ensuring its relevance in modern literary contexts and affirming its capacity to engage meaningfully with contemporary human experience.

## 9. Conclusion

The present study has examined the reinterpretation of Indian myths in Indian English fiction as a significant literary practice that bridges tradition and modernity. The analysis has shown that myths are not merely preserved in their classical forms but are creatively reshaped to address contemporary social, cultural, and psychological concerns. Through reinterpretation, Indian English novelists transform inherited narratives into dynamic literary tools capable of engaging with modern realities.

The study has highlighted various modes through which myth is reinterpreted, including social, gendered, and psychological frameworks. By placing myths within modern contexts, writers critique social hierarchies, question patriarchal structures, and explore individual identity and inner conflict. The use of myth in relation to history and cultural identity further demonstrates its role in reconstructing the past and negotiating postcolonial selfhood. These reinterpretations reveal myth as a flexible and meaningful structure rather than a static cultural artifact.

In conclusion, the reinterpretation of myths significantly enriches Indian English fiction by providing symbolic depth, cultural continuity, and critical insight. It enables writers to engage with collective memory while simultaneously challenging inherited meanings and ideologies. The continued relevance of myth in Indian English fiction affirms its enduring literary and cultural value, establishing reinterpretation as a vital strategy for creative expression and critical reflection.

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