

Editorial

Introduction

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‘Myths do not happen all at once. They do not spring forth whole into the world. They form slowly, rolled between the hands of time until their edges smooth, until the saying of the story gives enough weight to the words—to the memories—to keep them rolling on their own.

But all stories must start somewhere... (VE Schwab---A Conjuring of Light).

The oral tradition of myths and legends are an important and integral part in the life of man. They are a vibrant and enduring feature of man’s culture which takes on a life of its own, changing in the hands of each storyteller. Each retelling is unique in its own way. Children have been brought up on tales---fairy or myth, legends, traditions, and folklore. These have educated the young, instilling certain cultural values in them. At the same time in this day, myths can be a catalyst for a wider range of new ideas and imaginative recreation much like the saying “old wine in a new bottle”. They signal a rebirth and re invention of culture.

The rationalist temper of the enlightenment had rejected myths as blind superstitions, but the German thinker Herder rehabilitated their position. According to him myths are symbolical forms arising out of collective experiences around which the cultural imaginaries of particular communities cohere. After Herder’s co-relation between myths, culture and society, the Romantics gave an almost cult status to the mythopoeic imagination which transformed metaphysical idealism to concrete forms. More recently however, the concept of myths as transcendent representations of natural phenomena experienced by man has been modified to fit into a more cultural, psychological, even ideological perspective. The gradual secularisation of the discourse has led to the emergence of various lenses through which to view the semiotics of myths. The interpretations of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have held that these symbolical tales represent archetypes of recurrent and universal causes of individual neurosis. Karl Marx pointed to the role of myths as powerful tools to enforce the ideological apparatus of the state. Derrida has discussed the internalisation of myths as foundational metaphors of western civilisation, whereas Roland Barthes and Adorno have studied its relation to popular culture and the culture industry, respectively.

Myths and legends it may be said, can be used in various manners: to embody transcendent philosophies, to provide cultural identity, to enforce conformity to social and political ideologies. In India, where myths and religiosity are an important part of our voluntary participation in rituals as part of the quotidian, its role in the collective imagination and as a part of an ongoing bid for cultural homogenisation cannot be denied, although the

multiplicity of myths in a diverse country can sometime challenge the obliteration of difference.

Keeping in mind this train of thought the fifth volume of *Colloquium*, the interdisciplinary journal of the Arts faculty, presents papers on the reinventing of myths and legends in the present age.

Urban legends arise in the course of the evolution of a modern metropolis which is often accompanied by its own lore which may proliferate through rumour, gossip and anecdotes. Kolkata, or, Calcutta, an amalgam of the old and new, be it buildings, traditions or beliefs, is full of these stories. In her article titled "Some selected Ghost stories as Urban Legends of Calcutta", Debika Banerjee attempts to classify the urban legends of Calcutta in her presentation. By classifying these legends she has been able to link the various stories that are part and parcel of the rich lore of Calcutta.

Theatre is one of the oldest and most popular mediums of literary art known to man which has a close association with myths. It has evolved through the ages and the genre has constantly enriched itself with its variety of source material. Tirthankar Sengupta's article on "Performing Meghnadbadh Kabya: Questioning Conventions and Challenging the Conventional" turns to the representation myths through performance. Bengali Theatre has its origins in the British rule of the early 19th century. It has always been popular and powerful in spreading social and cultural awareness. Sengupta has traced the journey of the myth of The Ramayana from Michael Madhusudan Dutt's MeghnadBadh Kavya to thespian Gautam Halder's brilliant and unconventional artistic deconstruction of it.

The hermeneutics of suspicion which have moulded modern reception of myths has led to the questioning of the societal or moral values sought to be imposed through the power of myths. The great Indian epics are part and parcel of the social construction of the position and conduct expected of individuals in everyday life. The two papers that have been based on these epics have shown totally different approaches to the stories that are part of the rich Indian lore. Shreya Bhattacharya and Dr. Aniksha Roy's paper titled "*Traversing the meandering lanes of women's vocalizations and political manipulations : An introspection into the Epic Mahabharata*" has given us insights into the life and position of women in the patriarchal society of India during that era. They touch upon several issues regarding women with emphasis on the "dharma" of women.

Paromita Chakrabarty has tried to put a historical construct on myths and legends. In her article called "Reviewing the Myths: Phule's Approach to the Past by Means of Deconstruction" she has explicated on the way Jyotiba Phule has tried to de-construct the myth of the Puranas by showing that these myths actually had their foundations in historical events. By discussing how these myths were structured to suit the society of those times, the links between historiography and myths is suggested.

Souradeep Sen's paper titled "Surviving the Global Epoch: The Myth of Sisyphus Revisited" is an explication on the semiotic relevance of Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus* in relation to globalisation. He opines that globalism is a myth and man is becoming a victim of alienation. He posits the notion of global man who, like Sisyphus is doomed to be continually in search of the meaning of life.

Who has not heard of the "Western" in American films? Arup Ratan Samajdar in his paper called 'Tales of Violence and Revival: Persistence of the Mythic Hero in American Cinema'

explores the popular myth of the evergreen 'western' hero in films, thereby exploring the link between the entertainment industry and the creation of cultural icons. The paper traces the concept of the western hero through the history of the white man's settlement in the vast desolate areas of America to his depiction in motion pictures. The popularity of the western hero may have waned at times but it has never completely disappeared from the silver screen.

Soumya Bhattacharjee's article, ***Gopal theke Dashu: 'Jana' Myther Bhanga Gora***, follows Marxist commentators in exploring the stories of *Pagla Dashu*, which revolve round the eponymous hero, an iconic figure in Bengali children's literature, created by Sukumar Ray. Dashu, the incorrigible prankster subverts all attempts to make him fit within the binaries of the 'good boy' or 'bad boy', represented through the figures of Gopal and Rakhal. In Bhattacharjee's reading, it is his disruptive resistance which makes Dashu a cultural icon for the middleclass Bengalis, otherwise restricted by expectations of cultural conformity.

This volume brings together various receptions of myths by contemporary scholars with the hope that this will contribute to a richer understanding of the power of myths and legends and the dynamics of their construction and dissemination through various media.