CHAPTER FIVE
CRITICAL ANALYSES OF THE NOVELS
IN RELATION TO THEIR USE OF MYTH – 2


Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is the story of Saleem Sinai who is born at midnight at the exact hour of India’s independence in 1947 along with the other one thousand children born at the stroke of midnight. The novel is concerned primarily with the protagonist’s quest for identity in relation to his past as well as his country’s past. Every event in his life synchronizes with a major political or historical event in India’s destiny. He, in fact, defines himself by his relation to India’s history. Saleem himself proclaims that he was linked both literally and metaphorically, and actively and passively, inextricably entwined, with his world. (Rushdie 285-286).

Aruna Srivastava in her essay “‘The Empire Writes Back’: Language and History in *Shame* and *Midnight’s Children*” asserts:

Saleem is India: he is All-India Radio, a map of India, the instigator of her fierce language riots. The trials and tribulations of his body and his family are inextricably entwined with those of his country—the various births, labours and deaths in the book correspond exactly to major events in Indian history […] (he constantly asserts) that he (is) fathered by history and handcuffed to it. (Srivastava 62-63)
Salman Rushdie uses several narrative devices to connect the protagonist’s personal history with the history of India. One among them is the use of birth images and metaphors to mark some of the turning points in history and their significance. Another is to show that the political and historical events are linked to each of the important happenings in the life of Saleem or his relatives. At the historical level, the novel covers about six decades in the history of the Indian subcontinent, which includes several incidents: the Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy, Quit India Movement, Freedom movement, the Muslim League and its role, bloodshed due to Partition, Five Year Plans, Language riots, the Chinese aggression, the Pakistan War, the Liberation of Bangladesh and the Emergency. Thirdly, the author uses Padma as a character who is functional at both the narrative and symbolic levels. Fourthly, he uses irony extensively in the novel so that the novel moves into the genre of a political satire. And finally, he uses images to show the periodic previews of the events that are yet to occur (Parameswaran 5).

Saleem is thirty years old when the narrative begins and there are thirty chapters in the book, but the narration is non-linear. Rushdie playfully exchanges two newborns, Saleem and Shiva, who are interchanged by Mary Pereira, the midwife. However, the displaced Sinai child becomes the violent Shiva owing to his upbringing. In fact, among the one thousand and one children born at the stroke of midnight, only five hundred and eighty survive. These children are endowed with special powers. Saleem comes to know that one beautiful girl, Sundari, from Delhi had the power to make anyone blind when they looked at her, a boy from Kerala could step into mirrors or any reflective surface he wished and re-emerge, a girl from Goa had the power to multiply fish, a boy from the Vindhyas could increase or reduce his size at will, a blue-eyed child from Kashmir had
the power to change his/her sex by immersing in water, there was a boy who could eat metal and a girl whose fingers were so green that she could grow prize aubergines in the Thar desert, and so on (Rushdie 236-237). Among these children, three acquire prominence: Saleem, Shiva and Parvati. Saleem is given “the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men” (Rushdie 239). He can read others’ thoughts. Saleem calls it ‘Telepathy’, that is, he can tune his ears to read the inner thoughts of other people around him. He is expelled from a children’s gang and so he decides to set up his own gang which would be spread over the length and breadth of the country and he calls it “Midnight Children’s Conference, my very own M.C.C” (Rushdie 247), which is a parody of the Marylebone Cricket Club in England and a reminder of India’s colonial connections. Shiva is “given the gifts of war (of Rama, who can draw the undrawable bow; of Arjuna and Bhima; the ancient prowess of Kurus and Pandavas united, unstoppably, in him!) (Rushdie 239). Parvati is given “the power of the true adept, the illuminatus, the genuine gifts of conjuration and sorcery, the art which required no artifice” (Rushdie 239).

In this novel, the real and the fantastic are overlaid by relating its characters to the Hindu mythical archetypes. One can associate Saleem and his son Aadam (who is the natural son of Shiva) with the elephant-headed god Ganesha, the god of Good Fortune, the son of Shiva and Parvati in Hindu mythology. This myth is probably the most significant one in the novel. Satish Barbuddhe reiterates this idea in his essay, “Midnight’s Children: A Blend of Autobiography, History and Fantasy”:

Aadam Aziz is said to have a nose ‘comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed Ganesh’ [...] Saleem’s ‘son’ Aadam Sinai is described as
'the true son of Shiva-and-Parvati—(the) elephant-headed Ganesh.'
Aadam has the qualities of Ganesh i.e. ability to overcome difficulties. Ganesh is ‘the typical embodiment of success in life and its accompaniments of good living, prosperity and peace.

(Barbuddhe 209)

Saleem has also been equated to the character of Karna of the Mahabharata by Maria Elena Martos Hueso in the essay “A Tryst with Fate and History: A Study of Midnight's Children.” Neither Karna nor Saleem knows (in the beginning of their life) that they belong to a different family. Their fate deprives them of the knowledge of their true origins. In the novel, Mary Pereira changed the two newly born children; and Saleem gets the chance to live in the lap of luxury while Shiva had to lead a disgusting life. However, in the epic, Karna does not know of his noble blood and leads an ordinary life. Karna, in fact comes to the limelight only after Duryodhana names him the King of Anga. Mary Pereira can be equated to Kunti because they are responsible for these happenings in the novel and the myth respectively. (Hueso 168). Hueso further notes:

In any case, the only result, the sad common fate shared by Saleem and Karna is a dismembering of identities, that only results in profound unhappiness, a sense of an authentic self which has been inevitably lost and cannot be retrieved. (Hueso 168)

Shiva, in the novel, is Saleem’s alter-ego; a symbolic representative of the Hindu God of destruction. Shiva is also time, justice, fire, water, sun and creator. However, he needs his female counterpart Parvati in order to create. Parvati, in the novel, plays an important role in Saleem’s life as she secures Saleem’s safe return to India from
Bangladesh. Her wicker basket enables her to make men disappear with her powers of magic until she wants them to return. Thus, Rushdie interweaves contemporary and mythical realities not only to make the narration more interesting in a postmodern way but also to inextricably link the personal with the political and the national. Saleem’s identity crisis is post-Independence India’s (as well as Pakistan’s) identity crisis.

Another character who finds a parallel in the Hindu mythology is Padma. Padma means ‘lotus’ and in the traditional Indian consciousness, the lotus symbolizes one who was born in slime and mud, but is able to reach out to the higher things of life. Padma’s relationship with Saleem is often strained. She is an enchantress, but Saleem cannot extract heavenly pleasure from her as he is impotent. She is absolutely bereft of any kind of hypocrisy and is Saleem’s true critic. Though she is illiterate, she has a masterful control over Saleem as she is Saleem’s typical audience. She has an amazing power of storytelling. Though she irritates him several times, he has a great deal of love and respect for her. He tries to give her a godly image in these words:

[...] Padma along with the yaksagenii who represent the sacred treasure of the earth, and the sacred rivers, Ganga Yamuna Sarasvati, and the tree goddesses, is one of the Guardians of Life, beguiling and comforting mortal men while they pass through the dream-web of Maya...Padma, the Lotus calyx, which grew out of Vishnu’s navel, and from which Brahma himself was born; Padma the Source, the mother of Time! [...] (Rushdie 233)

It is from her that Saleem learns the techniques of pickling, displayed throughout the tale by her boiling pots of chutney. She is portrayed by Rushdie as a natural preserver
of traditions. Once again we have the combination of the sublime and the trivial, the eternal with the ephemeral.

At one point of time, Saleem also reflects on the concept of history as perceived in Hindu cosmology:

[...] history, in my version, entered a new phase on August 15th, 1947—but in another version, that inescapable date is no more than one fleeting instant in the Age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga—the losing throw in our national dice-game; the worst of everything; [...] When falsehood brings success [...] (it) is only the fourth phase of the present Maha-Yuga cycle which is, in total, ten times as long [...] it takes a thousand Maha-Yugas to make just one Day of Brahma, [...] (Rushdie 233)

Thus, the Hindu cosmology is considered in mythical terms to grasp the relationship between reality and illusion.

Several symbols in the novel also acquire the status of a myth. For instance, the perforated bedsheet kept as a family treasure. In the beginning, this sheet served as a screen to hide a woman's body (Naseem) from the eyes of the male doctor Aziz; though he becomes haunted by the "phantasm of a partitioned woman [...]" (Rushdie 23). Ultimately he glues her together in his imagination; falls in love with his image of Naseem. Later, when he marries her, he realizes that his imagination tallied very little with reality; thus man's imperfect perception is revealed through this symbol. However, the sheet becomes moth-eaten with the passage of time. Aziz discovers on 14 August 1947 that the hole had grown and that there were other smaller holes in the surrounding
fabric. Finally, in the India-Pakistan war of 1965, Saleem’s family along with its past and history is destroyed:

[...] sheets of flame rose from a Rawalpindi bungalow, perforated sheets at whose center hung a mysterious dark hole, which grew into the smoke-image of an old wide woman with moles on her cheeks... and one by one the war eliminated my drained, hopeless family from the earth.

(Rushdie 408)

Other such symbols that grow into a mythical shape in the course of the novel are the silver spittoon, the green metal box and Saleem’s umbilical cord.

Rushdie’s satire of the Indian political situation is found in the character of the widow, Indira Gandhi, who conflates her own image with that of the traditional Mother Goddess. At the midnight of June 25, 1975, just as Parvati brings forth her child, Indira Gandhi brings forth hers—Emergency rule. The baby Aadam, does not cry at all for the first year of his life; this parallels the nation’s silent acceptance of the new dictatorship. “He was the child of a father who was not his father; but also the child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again” (Rushdie 500). He was the true son of Shiva and Parvati, he was the elephant-headed Ganesh. The reference to the mythological name Ganesh is in fact an expectation for the auspicious beginning in a matter-of-fact, real world of obvious challenges and demands. On the other hand, Indira Gandhi’s swift and cruel actions during the Emergency were perceived to be analogous with the actions of Devi, the Hindu Goddess. She had immense powers as a politician and she used them to the maximum too.
Apart from these subtle references to myth, there are certain places in the novel where we can notice a direct reference to various myths. For instance, when Saleem gives a description of the Old Fort, he cannot stop himself from talking about the monkeys. Saleem says that even if there is no Old Fort in the future, the monkeys would still be there, "screaming in triumph […] (he describes one monkey) Hanuman, […] The monkey god who helped Prince Rama defeat the original Ravana, Hanuman of the flying chariots […]" (Rushdie 96).

Thus, Rushdie has ingeniously used myths and mythical narratives to justify the actions of his protagonist and the events occurring in his life. Maria Elena Martos Hueso rightly says that Saleem is "a victim as well as a perpetrator of (hi)stories, as he […] uses the role imposed on him as a weapon to model India's history and his own personal story" (Hueso 173). Rushdie has historicized myth and fictionalized history. He draws on the models of Indian epics to explain the personal history of Saleem and the national history of India. He in fact attempts to prove that reality can be grasped in a better manner through myth. M.M. Rao suggests that history becomes significant when there is "[…] imaginative portrayal of men and matters, political and historical so as to view history in the larger perspective of human history rather than in the limited focus of a nation's particular chapter" (quoted in Shekhar 50). On the other hand, several instances in the novel represent the postcolonial strategy of mimicry trespassing into the boundaries of mockery. The novel is considered a postcolonial novel in the sense that it moves away from the colonizer's language and uses its own innovative language to portray the condition of the nation and his family. This process of de-colonizing English is found in his use of indigenous words like 'chutnification', 'feringhee', 'zenana' etc. Urmil Talwar
in the essay "Midnight's Children: A Fantasy" points out that one major device in voicing the 'other' is by the use of fantasy (Talwar 247) and Midnight's Children abounds in the use of fantasy. The novel also "seeks to emancipate the formerly colonized people from the reverential awe in which they held the colonizers" (Ghosh 25). For instance, the "imposing figure of Mountbatten is reduced to insignificance ('Mountbatten with his extraordinary haste and his chicken-breast eater of a wife') and General Dyer is remembered only as a tyrant devoid of human emotions ('Mercurochrome')" (Ghosh 25). Rushdie also debunks the myths that sustained the empire and thus enforces the postcolonial standpoint in the novel.


The best example in the conscious use of myth to portray and satirize the Indian political situation is found in Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel. The very title is taken from its primary source of inspiration, viz. the Mahabharata. Incidentally, the title makes us wonder whether the Mahabharata is not indeed the great Indian novel, the mother of all Indian narratives. Alternatively, the author may also be making such a claim for his own work! It mixes the myth of the Mahabharata with India's history especially the period that led to the Indian freedom struggle and that which immediately follows India's Independence. Tharoor uses the plot and characters from the Mahabharata to re-interpret and rewrite the political history of modern India. The novel is set in the fictional princely state of Hastinapur, which would soon be annexed by the British Raj. The narrative moves through several historic events that led to the partition and independence. Tharoor freely adapts the epic to suit the saga of Indian politics.
However, in this process, the basic narrative of the epic is kept intact. There is no falsification in its potential or its metaphoric application.

There are eighteen books in all on the pattern of the great epic. The chapter titles are intertextual replications or adaptations of earlier books on India, e.g. “The Raj Quartet”. This is part of Tharoor’s attempt to relate his narrative to other earlier narratives on India, including the *Mahabharata* and those by the colonizers. The whole novel is a narration by Ved Vyas (V.V) to Ganapathi the modern scribe who comes dragging his huge trunk! Tharoor himself points out that he used V.V. as the narrator because he is both a witness to history and a leading participant in it and therefore, it makes it possible to provide a first-hand relation of events as they really happened (quoted in Shah 84). The narrative covers all the major political-historical events of the twentieth century—the events of the national freedom movement like the Champaran Satyagraha, the Dandi March, the Round Table Conference and the Quit India Movement along with the events of the Partition, India’s independence, the wars with China and Pakistan, the liberation of Goa, the Emergency and after. Nevertheless, Tharoor has taken the liberty to play with the names of the characters and places. Each name is a blend of both the character in the myth and a major participant in Indian politics. For instance, Gangaji is an echo of both Bhishma and Gandhiji—an epitome of sacrifice, shunning all the materialistic pleasures of the world and showing concern for the people of the country, and Manimir, which is an echo of both Lord Shiva’s celestial abode and the “scenically beautiful and chronically underdeveloped northern state” of India, that is, Kashmir (Tharoor 240).
Tharoor has also taken liberties in the portrayal of incidents in his novel. Some of the mythical events may not sound reasonably right when trying to impose them on the contemporary events and therefore Tharoor adapts the myth to suit the modern day demands. For instance, to explain Ganga’s episode with her seven children, Tharoor refers to, “[...] Maharani who suffered seven miscarriages and disappeared when her eighth pregnancy produced a son” (Tharoor 21). Further, to show that it is not normal to throw one’s children into a river, Tharoor adds, “[...] the seven children had died not entirely natural deaths and that the Maharani was not altogether normal” (Tharoor 21). With regard to Kunti’s proposal for marriage, Gangaji clarifies the ‘scandal’ that hung to her name, “[...] it appears that there may have been, ah... a certain indiscretion in her past. [...] a brief and entirely unwise liaison with a certain Hyperion Helios, a foreign visitor at her father’s palace” (Tharoor 44), Helios being an ingenious reference to the sungod (surya) who visited the Kunti of Mahabharata. In spite of this inglorious past, Gangaji is happy to accommodate her in the Hastinapur palace showing the right spirit of ‘forgiveness’ and ‘generosity’. Tharoor takes liberties with the original in the portrayal of Kunti. She smokes Turkish cigarettes; wears Banaras sari, Bombay nails, Bangalore sandals and Bareilly bangles (Tharoor 265). After her marriage, she gives birth to five sons. They are Yudhistir (Morarji Desai), Bhim (the army), Arjun (the press), Nakul (the administrative services), and Sahadev (the diplomatic service). Vidur, the wise one, is Sardar Patel.

The narrative begins in the princely state of Hastinapur during the British Raj amidst fears of annexation lurking after the death of King Shantanu. The state of Hastinapur without an heir is typical of the Indian freedom movement under the Congress
divided into the moderates and the extremists. However, Gandhi (Gangaji) took charge of the affairs in the Congress by appointing Jawaharlal Nehru (Dhritarashtra) the heir apparent to the leadership of the Congress and the nation. There follow all the major developments of the freedom struggle. The ‘Hastinapur massacre’ takes place, which is a parallel to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Gangaji organizes the ‘Mango March’, which is an echo of the Dandi March undertaken by Gandhiji. Soon, there arise differences of opinion between the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu and the Pandavas are sent on an exile. Gandhari dies, “neglected in death as in life by Dhritarashtra” (Tharoor 217), a comment on the relation between Nehru and his wife Kamala. As the epic continues, Indian politics saw the formation of the Congress and the Muslim League. Ganga Dutta was not tolerant of the rise of Pandu (who corresponds to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in Indian history) to the presidentship of the Kaurava party and by exerting a moral pressure on Pandu, forces him to resign. Soon, the Muslim League expressed its opinion in favour of a new state for the Muslims, and Dhritarashtra (Nehru) found himself facing the ‘acid test’ of reality—he pleaded with Gangaji and against the wishes of Gangaji, the working committee of the Kaurava party resolved unanimously to accept in principle the partition of the country. Though Mohammad Ali Kama (Md. Ali Jinnah) began his political career in the Kaurava Congress party, he soon found himself accepting the honourable position of the presidentship of Karnistan (Pakistan). Gangaji, meanwhile, dies a victim in the wake of the partition riots and his assassin is Amba/Shikhandin/Godse. Bhishma, in the *Mahabharata* in fact, had the boon to die at his own will and he wanted to die in the Uttarayanam phase. Therefore, he lay on a bed of
arrows provided to him by Arjun and the river Ganga as a stream of water to keep him cool. Here, in this novel, Gangaji was given a glass of water as his last dying wish.

Tharoor also naturalizes the myth in the process of his story telling. For instance, Vichitravirya died of consumption, and Ved Vyas was the heir apparent. Ambika closed her eyes during her union with Ved Vyas and thus she gave birth to a blind son, Dhritarashtra. Ambalika, on the other hand, turned pale and she gave birth to a pale son, Pandu. Ved Vyas also had a union with a maidservant, the outcome of which was Vidur, the wise one, who later becomes a counsellor to the kings. Dhritarashtra is India's Jawaharlal Nehru, a formidable debater, slim, with an aquiline nose and an aristocratic bearing. In the epic, Dhritarashtra marries Gandhari who gained Lord Shiva's boon that she will beget no less than a hundred sons. However, Tharoor naturalizes the myth and in the novel, the outcome of Nehru's marriage with Kamala is Indira Priyadarshini, who is said to be the equal of a hundred men. It is obvious here that the father's love for his daughter made him blind to several realities and the mythical Dhritarashtra is equalled to the novel's Jawaharlal Nehru. In fact, Dhritarashtra's blindness as both physical and metaphorical is retained here. His blindness however is presented in the novel in ironic and humorous terms. At one point, Tharoor claims that his words are filled with "visual metaphors".

Post-Independence India also signalled the birth of Indian democracy, often regarded as a product of India's historic union with Britain. Tharoor presents this union and its progeny in the most imaginative way, but at the same time, takes bold and even outrageous liberties with both history and myth. In the epic, Draupadi takes her name from her father King Drupad. Turning to contemporary history, it was a well-known fact
that there existed a deep personal friendship between Jawaharlal Nehru and Edwina Mountbatten. In the novel, Tharoor makes his fictional characters Dhritarashtra (corresponding to the historical figure of Nehru) and Georgina Mountbatten (who is ingeniously made to carry the surname of Drewpad, which has phonetic similarity with Drupad). Then the illicit child born of her relationship with Dhritarashtra is named Draupadi and she is given in adoption to a man called Mokrasi. It is thus that she gets the name Draupadi Mokrasi, or D.Mokrasi! Here, Tharoor adopts a completely imaginary framework, playing it safe without raising any controversy. She is, in fact, portrayed by Tharoor as the centre of post-partition politics. Tharoor, thus, symbolically presents Indian democracy as a product of the union of India and Britain. Another incident where Tharoor moves slightly away from the original is the Ekalavya episode. In the original epic, on Drona’s command, Ekalavya cuts his thumb and offers it to his guru Drona as guru dakshina. However, in this novel, Drona demands a fee, the thumb of his right hand, and Ekalavya explains that he has to look after his mother when she becomes old and that he cannot give his thumb to his Guru. This angers Drona and he shouts at him to get out of his sight. As Ekalavya moves out, Drona laughs loudly and even dodges to answer the question asked by Yudhistira if he would have taken his fee if the student had willingly given it. Critics have seen in Ekalavya’s refusal (to give in to Drona’s inhuman demand) the resistance offered by marginalized sections to upper caste domination, and the assertion of their right to education on par with the upper classes.

After Dhritarashtra’s (Nehru’s) death, Shishu Pal (Lal Bahadur Shastri) becomes the Prime Minister, who after signing the peace treaty with Karnistan moves into an eternal sleep. This incident was followed by the installation of Priya Duryodhani as the
third Prime Minister of independent India. She had two legislative victories to her credit. The first one being marked by the resignation of Yudhistir (Morarji Desai) and the second one, beset by conflict and controversy, the death of Dr. Mehrban Imandah (Dr. Zakir Hussain). She had brilliantly coined the ‘Remove Poverty’ slogan, which was in turn used by her own critics, who raised the slogan ‘Remove Duryodhani’. The most opportune moment in her political career, however, is the occasion of Gelabi Desh War (Bangladesh War). Soon Duryodhani had to face severe criticism and several incidents lead to the battle of the ballots, the battle between dharma and adharma, good and evil.

There is a long discourse between Arjuna and Krishna, thus the Gitopadesha. Yudhistir wins the war; Morarji Desai is the leader. Tharoor ends the novel with a scene in the other world and the encounter between Yudhishtira and Dharma, a reminiscence of the message that is always taught by the Indian epics—Dharma is eternal, and it also ends in the assertion that Dharma is relative.

G.R. Taneja in his essay “The Second Wave: Indian English Fiction of the 1980’s” asserts:

In Tharoor’s novel the Truth and the Dharma of the Mahabharata suffer as much as the myths of the freedom movement. What is ultimately put to test is ancient wisdom which is one of the obsessive concerns of everyone in the great epic as well as in contemporary history [...] He invents new metaphors to re-invent our past as well re-shape our present.

(Taneja 95)

Tharoor has used myth consciously to ridicule the chaos prevalent in the Indian society and politics before and after independence. As Sudhendu Shekhar puts it: “The
political history of modern India, bearing resemblance to the events and characters of a bygone period underlines the evolution of chaos as a result of the foibles and follies of the political personalities with responsibility. They fail to live up to their expectations and equate that responsibility community-wise, instead indulge in self-aggrandizement. The upholders of dharma in the two texts—Bhishma and Gandhi—fell sacrificial victims to their own progenies and protégés, for their inability to reconcile the imperatives of power” (Shekhar 97).

Tharoor rightly blends seriousness and casual humour, and suggests that in Indian politics, a major turn over can be expected at any time. For instance, he presents the disrobing of Draupadi by Dusshasana as a parallel to Indira Gandhi’s Dusshasana, that is, her misrule during the Emergency Period. Several such incidents in the novel present the author’s intentions to mock at the political condition of India. However, the eternal values preached by the epics are retained though Tharoor preoccupies himself with a critical-satirical attitude in the novel. However, sometimes, even these values, something taken for granted for ages, are under question. Tharoor is highly critical of history too. “History […] is full of savage ironies” (Tharoor 74).

Nevertheless, in this process of re-telling history, Tharoor does not forget to give a special kind of sensibility to the characters in the novel. The characters are given the sensibility to understand the situations and react accordingly. For instance, when the five sons of Kunti were planning to go along with Drona for the work in the villages, they went to their mother to take leave. Kunti was obviously sad that they were leaving her alone in the palace; however, she could not refuse them. After they had left, she cried to God, “Why me, Lord, every time? Why must I be abandoned by every man to whom I
give myself? Even by the sons I bore with such pain?” (Tharoor 267). She seemed to get an answer from the breeze that blew and dried her tears, “it is your karma, Kunti” (Tharoor 267). Thus, similar to what the myth suggests, Tharoor also seems to suggest that nobody can escape his/her karma.

Tharoor mythicizes history and historicizes and demythicizes the myth, thus a double effect is achieved in the novel. He begins the novel with this sentence, “They tell me India is an underdeveloped country” (Tharoor 17) and ends it in the same sentence—this suggests the circularity of the novel. After going through several trials and tribulations, we reach the point where we had begun, to start afresh. Perhaps another epic may be re-told as a parallel to the Indian political situation. Thus, Tharoor transforms the ancient myth of the Mahabharata by using it as a framework to re-narrate the history and politics of modern India, while at the same time acknowledging that his narrative is by no means the final narrative. He uses ancient national heritage to foreground the eternal present. Tharoor historicizes myth by associating the mythical characters with those found in the Indian Politics. Conversely, the political events are raised to the level of myth by associating them with the events of the Mahabharata, thus they attain a sublime and exalted status, and thus Tharoor mythicizes history. However, when Tharoor uses myth to represent the Indian historical condition, he does so with humour and thus the reverence for the myth is lost. Thus, the myth is de-sacralized. In that sense, the novel is a parody of both the Mahabharata and contemporary Indian history. The lack of reverence takes a specifically postcolonial form in many places, holding the British up to ridicule, e.g. the sarcastic and libellous reference to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, “the legendary King Arthur (who, if he existed at all, was a superstitious cuckold,
which is hardly my idea of a national hero)” (Tharoor 114). This episode portrays the postcolonial stance of ambivalence, that is, the colonized in its attempt to mimic the colonizer almost moves closer to mocking them instead. Another example that sets the same tone is the Drona-Heaslop episode. Heaslop had once insulted Drona when Drona had been to Heaslop with a card, given to him in return for all the knowledge and instruction imparted on the subject of holy shastras (Tharoor 160). Heaslop degraded Drona so much so that Drona had “vowed to work for the defeat and expulsion of Heaslop and the government he represents, not only by supporting the Kaurava Party in its just struggle against the oppressor, but by educating and training those who will one day rise to lead our people when we replace the alien system they have thrust upon us” (Tharoor 161). Drona worked hard towards his goal and one fine day, he was sitting in his cabin after India had achieved independence and Heaslop was at his door asking for help. Tharoor cleverly utilizes the situation by providing the readers two different responses of Drona. The first response of Drona was to humiliate Heaslop and show him the door, which later Tharoor says did not happen, but adds, “I wish it had, that Indians had proved capable of paying the Raj back[...] in its own coin[...] Revenge was the one quality conspicuously absent in the way he, and other members of the independent Indian government, treated their former masters” (Tharoor 242). What really happened was that Drona had been very courteous to Heaslop and almost immediately wrote “You shall be transferred to New Delhi with immediate effect, Mr. Heaslop” (Tharoor 243) which was what he had badly wanted and with a namaste, he departed.

This novel is also the best example for intertextuality. All the incidents are narrated and looked at from the point of view of several texts, many of them colonial
texts, or texts of the Raj: the *Mahabharata* is one text, books on the Indian political situation are another text, Indian History is another. And myth is in conjunction with these inter-textual elements. This is probably done by Tharoor to highlight the composite nature of modern Indian society and the complexity of the Indian political condition.

Thus, as Nila Shah puts it rightly in her essay “Yoking of Myth to History: Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*”,

> By using myths and legends in this novel, Shashi Tharoor works in the ‘mythical modes’. A cyclical movement of time renders linear history meaningless. The mythical mode gives the narrative the magnitude and enables the author to authenticate the historical experience. [...] It is in a way, post-colonial reply to colonial consciousness. (Shah 101)


Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* is an example of a deliberate use of myth to elucidate the problems faced by women in Indian society. This novel is a good example of myths moving into the contours of feminism. The novel provides a perfect setting to delineate the problems faced by women in a patriarchal society and how far they have been successful in their revolt against it.

The narrator and protagonist is Devi, who remembers her grandmother’s tales of Gods and Goddesses, which the grandmother appropriately used to compare with the family situations. Devi, in turn, is required to learn a moral from each of these stories. The narrator explains:
My grandmother’s stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded. A comparison had to be made, an illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out. (Hariharan 27)

Several mythical characters animate the lives and actions of the major characters in the novel; the most important ones being those of Damayanti, Gandhari, Amba and Ganga to correspond to the circumstances faced by Devi, Sita and Uma. Devi’s grandmother has a mythical equivalent for all the significant happenings in her family, especially those concerning women.

The novel has a prelude and three parts. The prelude gives us the clue that the narrator is a female, and therefore the readers can be prepared for a story that would be exclusively from a woman’s point of view. It also gives the reader an understanding that several mythical narratives may be revisited as the narrator takes the reader through her life story. Some of these mythical narratives are in the form of fables narrated by the narrator’s grandmother and the narrator perceives a parallel in her life. The narrator’s inquisitive mind is seen through the several questions asked by her: “[…] why she had to put up with her life […]” (Hariharan ix) etc. However, the other three parts are divided into sections that are in accordance with the different settings.

Devi had been a victim of culture shock in New York where she had gone to pursue her Master’s degree in Arts. She had an African-American friend named Dan who had provided her an opportunity to meet his friends and relatives. Devi was extremely happy to note that their women voiced their rights without any fear. Racism had affected
them quite badly; however, they had come out of it with an all-inclusive power to hit against the Whites so much so that when Devi shows a little gift of Krishna's idol, one among them remarked, “They couldn’t bear to have a black god, so they made him blue, huh?” (Hariharan 5). Devi, at once, knew that she was at the wrong place with the wrong gift for the wrong boyfriend. This incident, however, changed her outlook on life. She could not think of being there forever. Her mother’s frequent long letters forced her to be quite practical in life. And she did not want to be a part of it at all. Her Brahmin upbringing also played a significant role in making her conscious of her roots and therefore, she came back to India for good.

Devi came back to Madras, to her mother Sita and she at once loved the familiar smell of her house and her mother. However, the relationship between Devi and her mother Sita was not a very intimate one. They were, in fact, quite conscious of each other. Even when Devi tried to tell her mother about America, Sita would say, “All that is over now” (Hariharan 13). Devi’s mother was intent on getting her daughter married. Devi’s swayamwara begins and so does the author’s use of mythical events to describe the incidents happening to the characters in the novel.

The myth used here to highlight the situation as told by Devi’s grandma, which Devi remembers, is that of Nala and Damayanti. The readers understand the obvious intention of this myth here, that is, just as the worthy Damayanti chose her heart’s desire, the worthy Nala, Devi will also be “introduced” to several ‘princes’ and she was to choose her heart’s desire. This myth is like a prelude to Devi’s experiences to undergo a swayamwara, to prepare Devi for it. However, Devi chose Mahesh who “is no prince, but
a regional manager in a multinational company that makes detergents and toothpaste” (Hariharan 22).

As Devi remembers her grandma and her childhood days, the picture of her mother holding a veena captured her attention. Sita, her mother had been very fond of playing the veena. However, after her marriage to Devi’s father, one day, her husband blamed her for not performing her wifely duties satisfactorily. This hurt her pride and she promised to never play the veena again. The myth that is being narrated to explain this situation is that of Gandhari’s. Gandhari’s pride was hurt when she knew that her husband was blind and therefore as an extreme step of sacrifice, she blindfolds herself. This same sacrifice could be discerned in Sita’s actions as she as vowed never to play the musical instrument, which she had held quite close to her heart. Devi interpreted the whole situation in a different way. She could see Gandhari’s anger, “wrapped tightly round her head in a life-long blindfold” and the same anger “burnt in a heart close, very close” to hers, that is, in her mother. (Hariharan 29). She could see that her parents were afflicted by a kind of blindness: “In their blinkered world, they would always be one, one leading the other, one hand always in the grasp of other” (Hariharan 29).

Another myth that is told by her grandmother is that of a beautiful girl who married a snake. A childless couple offered several prayers to their Gods so that they could have children. They did have an answer to their prayers, but they had a snake as their offspring. The woman nursed the snake despite the warnings of her neighbours and well-wishers. When the snake grew into an adult, the father went in search of a good girl who would marry his son. One of his hosts offered his daughter’s hand in marriage. But, when he came to know that it was a snake for whom he had offered his daughter, he
wanted to take back his words, but the girl declared that a girl is given only once in
marriage. So she proceeded to live with her snake husband. She, however, turned her
husband into a handsome human being with her touch and she burnt the snakeskin into
ashes. This story was told by Devi’s grandma in connection with her servant Gauri’s
marriage. Gauri had been married to someone in her village, but she fell in love with her
young brother-in-law who was an albino. Gauri had the courage to run away from her
home along with this new husband and she was considered an outcaste. However, from
this story, Devi could not really identify who the real snake was—the first husband or the
brother-in-law.

Nevertheless, these two myths are closely related to Devi’s own life because,
though she married Mahesh, she did not really want to be blind in her wifely duties to
him. She wanted to be independent. When she understood that her husband was treating
her like a puppet, and when ‘the sacrificial knife, marriage, hung a few inches above her
neck for years’ (Hariharan 54), she walked out of her marriage and sought happiness and
adventure in the hands of a singer by name Gopal. Therefore, we can understand that
Devi had not been a mere spectator or a listener to these myths narrated by her
grandmother; she had internalized all of them and arrived at her own interpretations. Her
grandmother’s intentions were only to make Devi aware of the different stories that made
the Mahabharata, and teach her the moral values of life. Slowly, all the mythical stories
narrated by her grandmother moved into Devi’s very soul and being. She had the urge to
close her eyes, contemplate and call each one of those mythical beings in front of her to
see them. This urge moved into her subconscious mind and she started having dreams
wherein she is herself one of those mythical characters. She takes the form of Durga in
one of her dreams. She learns the art of shooting and she masters it. Her husband is her loyal knight with a bamboo flute, Krishna. She gives birth to strong sons and daughters. When a man assaults her youngest daughter, she kills him. Thus, myths started playing a very important role in Devi’s imaginations and dreams.

The myth of Amba was narrated by the grandmother to explain Devi’s cousin Uma’s marriage. Uma, who had an indifferent father and a hostile stepmother, was married off to a wealthy home, but her husband and her father-in-law were drunkards. When her father-in-law misbehaved with her, she decided to run away to her grandmother’s house and stay with her. This story had a lot in common with Amba’s story. Amba was kidnapped by Bhishma along with her two sisters and taken to Hastinapura. Amba had already been in love with Salva, and when this was revealed, Bhishma gave her the permission to go to Salva. However, Salva did not accept her because she was a ‘left-over’ then. Amba could do nothing but go back to Bhishma and request him to marry her. Bhishma could not marry her because of his vows of celibacy. Amba was distraught and she made up her mind to take revenge. She earned a boon to be reborn as Shikhandin and ultimately, confronted Bhishma in the Great War. The lesson that Devi’s grandmother teaches Devi is that any woman can become a victim of disaster. “But a woman like Amba, a truly courageous woman, finds the means to transform her hatred, the fate that overtakes her, into a triumph” (Hariharan 36).

Devi’s father-in-law also had the habit of narrating stories from the *Mahabharata* just as her grandmother had done. However, his stories were quite different. While grandmother’s stories ‘were a prelude’ to her womanhood, and an ‘initiation into its subterranean possibilities’, her father-in-law’s stories ‘define the limits’ (Hariharan 51).
His stories were for those women who had already reached their goals and a lesson to what virtues they had to follow. His stories defined a perfect woman. However, his personal life was in a mess because his wife Parvati deserted him. Parvati's story was narrated to her by the housekeeper Mayamma. Apart from Devi's grandmother and mother, Mayamma was another woman, who, through her stories, changed Devi's outlook on life. Mayamma told Devi that Parvati had gone out of the house in search of her God. Devi could not exactly understand why Parvati should have left her husband. Either she did not exactly understand the stories told by her husband or she internalized them in such a way that she could no longer live with her husband. This is quite similar to what happened to Devi too which forced Devi to desert her husband. However, Devi considered Parvati to be her 'Guardian Angel' and would look into her picture everyday to draw inspiration from her to do things according to her own conscience.

Grandmother calls upon several other mythical figures like the Gita Govinda, Yudhishtira and Ganga, relating their stories to certain incidents in the life of the characters in the story. Devi, soon, realized the strength within her. She satisfies herself by assuming the following incarnations in her dreams and fantasies:

Like Sati you must burn yourself to death, like Sati you must vindicate your husband's honour and manhood.

Like Parvati you must stand neck-deep in cold, turbulent waters, the hungry, predatory fish devouring your feet.

Like Haimavati you must turn that black skin on your sinful body into a golden sheen of light and beauty.
Like Gauri you must reap the bountiful harvest that will be yours if you embrace the lingam on the sacrificial altar.

Like Durga you shall be a beautiful, yellow-faced woman with ten arms and ride on a Himalayan lion.

[Like] Kali, you thirst for war, for heroic feats in battle. (Hariharan 94-95)

These incarnations were fulfilled only in her dreams and fantasies, however, in reality, she could not conquer anything. These ancient myths, thus, seem to have become a burden that the modern woman simply cannot bear. Therefore, she wants to create a new myth. “I will walk on, seeking a goddess who is not yet made” (Hariharan 95). Probably, she wants to create an all-empowering goddess who has all the above incarnations within herself.

However, finally after all her fruitful and fruitless journeys, Devi realized that she could get her peace of mind only in her mother’s home. She prepares on her homecoming for a new beginning. The novel begins with her homecoming from New York and ends in the homecoming after her several experiences in life. She also realizes that she could bring a change in her mother’s outlook on life as Sita is also reborn and, as C. Vijayasree puts it in her essay “Re-visionist Myth-Making: A Reading of Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night”, “retrieves her lost self by returning to her music” (Vijayasree 180).

Thus, in her quest for an identity of her own, Devi meets all these wonderful women in her life and through the happenings in their lives, she learns lessons in her life. The subaltern in her rises above her situation and seeks to break free from the clutches of the society. Therefore, she reincarnates herself into several forms of the Goddess and has
her satisfaction in her achievements, though only in her dreams and fantasies. To achieve this, the author has cleverly fitted in several mythical stories. The colonized mind always has to fulfill its wishes by taking refuge in the myths of the past and Indian myths have more than one ways to fulfill them. Vijayasree explains, “Devi’s final assertion of her autonomy is thus the celebration of the power of the Divine Devi and that of the entire community of women” (Vijayasree 181). Devi and Sita, both, have decided on a new sojourn of life and this time it will be done together. This assertion is brought forth in the form of resistance to move away from the oppressed condition. In an attempt to regain their lost identities, the veena is brought back to life by Sita which marks Sita’s own revival and Devi’s revival could be seen in her homecoming, into the arms of her mother, who wholeheartedly welcomes her despite the messy past. The motto that serves their life now is “Look Ahead and Never Look Back” because a troublesome past might only provide a pessimistic view of life. Freedom is something that one has to insist upon and these two women achieve their freedom. Myths help them in realizing their roles in the society. Devi followed the myths very closely, but used them to define herself. She did not want to be a Gandhari or Sita, instead, she preferred to take the roles of Durga or Kali—one who would not conform to the patriarchal rules of the society, one who would immediately fight against oppression and one who would conform to one’s own rules. Her grandmother’s narratives were very open-ended, though there was an ostensible and rigid “moral” to each of them. When Devi realized that she had to rewrite/redefine her life, she decided to return to the warmth of her home/mother. This was done even earlier when she had realized that Dan was not the right friend. Therefore, this was like the
Second Homecoming. However, this time it is done with a lot of maturity and
determination and leads to a strong irrevocable decision.

**Kiran Nagarkar, *Cuckold* (1997)**

Kiran Nagarkar’s *Cuckold* (1997) is another novel where we can find the
historicization of myth done in an effective manner. The novel is placed in the early
sixteenth century India in the Rajput state of Mewar. The chief protagonist of the novel
is the prince of Mewar, Maharaj Kumar whose popularity lay in the fact that he married
the Krishna-bhakt Mirabai. The novel consists of forty nine chapters and an epilogue.
The narrative shifts from the first person to the third person whenever the Prince Maharaj
Kumar’s relationship with his wife is discussed. The affairs of the state are a first person
narration by Prince Maharaj Kumar. His wife is either referred to as the Princess or the
Little Saint (as she is known to the whole country) or Greeneyes (as Maharaj Kumar calls
her when he grows fond of her). Her name is not given anywhere in the novel. However,
if we look at the historical evidence, she is Mirabai, the one who had dedicated her *tan-
man-dan* (body-mind-soul) to the flautist-god Shri Krishna. In course of time, she turned
into a myth; thus history moving into the territories of myth. It is this myth that Nagarkar
explores in this novel. She was born in Merta and one story about her childhood goes
thus: a sadhu had come to her house. He had with him a very lovely image of Krishna.
She wanted to possess it and she asked him for the image. But he did not give it to her.
She was disappointed and almost fell ill. Meanwhile the sadhu had a vision in which he
heard Lord Hari say, “go and give this idol to Mira.” Amazed, the sadhu hastened and
handed it to her. Mira rejoiced and recovered her health. And later, she saw a wedding
procession and asked her mother “Who is my husband?” and her mother said, “Your husband is that Giridharlal whose image is ever in your hands”, and from then on, she started singing songs and dancing in praise of Lord Krishna. As she grew up, she started regarding Lord Krishna as her husband and on the very first night after her marriage to the Prince of Mewar, she declared to him that she is ‘spoken for’; that she is already betrothed to Lord Krishna. And when she publicly declared her love for her God through her love/bhakthi songs, Maharaj Kumar earned the title of ‘Cuckold’ for himself: “We were that rarest of couples. Even after years of marriage we were madly in love. I with her and she with somebody else” (Nagarkar 147).

Shanta Subba Rao, in the essay titled ‘Mirabai’ explains that the name ‘Mirabai’ “evokes a very complex and paradoxical image, a multifaceted personality in whom polarities meet. To the egocentric, vainglorious Rajput community, which prided itself on its deep-rooted royal traditional, social customs and hierarchical caste system, Mira is a self-assertive, non-conformist rebel whose name and memory should be wiped out of the annals of Rajput history as she had tarnished the image of the royal family” (Rao 110). However, to the feminists, she is the most liberated woman and to the whole world, she is the greatest of the devotees of Lord Krishna for whom she sacrificed everything in her life. When we talk about Mirabai, we imagine her as a gentle figure, clad in white, an ektara in her hand, dancing in deep ecstasy and singing the glories of God, unmindful of her physical surroundings. All these images are alive and relevant even now, as they were in the past. During the sixteenth century, when the word ‘feminine’ evoked only the image of someone physically beautiful, delicate, graceful and docile,
Mira was the first feminist, in the broadest sense of the term, who broke away from the narrow bonds of tradition, rigid social and religious customs, class and caste distinctions and discriminations, and sought absolute freedom. Her very life is a translation of the protest into action and the fulfillment of her ambition, a reaching-out to the goal. Her triumph is not limited to the freedom gained from the superficial, limited, materialistic level of the physical world, but extends to the region of the spirit where the individual soul is liberated totally and merged into the universal consciousness. (Rao 111-112)

Mira’s life as the Queen of Mewar, who travelled from Mewar to Dwarka through Brindavan, her life as a devotee of Krishna who bares her soul in her bhajans, is a journey in both the literal and metaphorical sense, from the profane to the sacred. (Rao 111-112).

Rao further notes in his essay on Mira that Mira’s rebellion begins with her refusal to accept anyone else as her husband except Giridharlal. She refuses to surrender to Maharaj Kumar as an object of pleasure; yet paradoxically, she audaciously declares in the most suggestive and erotic manner, her yearning for the physical presence and the love of Krishna whom she adores. She is totally besotted by the beauty of her beloved and has submerged her identity into his. (Rao 112). She is one with him. She says in one of her padas:

I have pledged my love to him
Life after life
And I am united
With him always (Bahadur 56)

Mirabai is a non-conformist in that she does not remain cloistered in the palace conforming to the dictates of Rajput tradition, but comes out into the streets, associates herself with saints, sages and common people who are socially her inferiors. As she brings disrepute to the family honour, the family tries to make her sleep on a bed of thorns and even poison her. But she emerges unscathed out of these means of suppression. She experienced innumerable hardships in her path of devotion. But it is her perseverance and love for her God that raised her to epic proportions; she turned into a legend and in course of time, she became a prominent mythical figure.

These were the earlier criticisms on Mira. However, in this novel, Nagarkar brings in a completely new angle of interpretation of the myth. Here, Maharaj Kumar is the marginalized character, a victim at the hands of Mira, thus the title of cuckold that he earns for himself. Nevertheless, Maharaj Kumar adored Mira. There are several instances in the novel where this adoration is evident. For instance, Maharaj Kumar was sent on a campaign along with his soldiers to the borders of Gujarat for eighteen months and when they were back at Chittor, they were not given a warm welcome. Prince Vikramaditya’s followers had tried to assasult them and it was Mirabai who came to the rescue of her husband with a gold plate in her hands, which had a lamp, kumkum and camphor: “Welcome home... Eklingji be praised. You and our friends and our armies have brought honour and victory to Mewar and its allies” (Nagarkar 272). After this incident, Maharaj Kumar started adoring his wife. And then cholera struck Mewar and thousands of Mewaris were victims of this dreadful disease. When all the members of the royal family fled to the neighbouring regions to avoid this disease, Maharaj Kumar and the Princess
stayed back at Mewar and rendered their services to the people of Mewar. The Little
Saint raised money to help the poor and the afflicted through her bhajans and finally she
herself became a victim of cholera. Her husband single-handedly took care of her—did
everything for her—fed her, cleansed her body periodically and his perseverance saved
his wife. He could never imagine losing her though she had never performed her wifely
duties towards him. Soon, their intimacy grew, though she had taken all her time in
singing bhajans for her only Lord, the Flautist, and Maharaj Kumar never demanded
more time for himself. He even painted himself blue and went to his wife’s room as the
night intruder with a flute in his hand and a feather in his cap. There was exactness in his
appearance to the Flautist and the Little Saint would play with her Lord, touch his feet,
dance around him and sing songs in praise of him. This went on for a few nights and
Maharaj Kumar derived a lot of pleasure from it too!

Several other characters in the novel have their own significance in terms of their
relationship to Maharaj Kumar. For instance: Kausalya, the lady who breast-fed him,
brought him up and initiated his sexual activities. If there was somebody in the kingdom
who knew the Prince intimately, it was Kausalya. She was also very possessive and
protective of Maharaj Kumar. She, in fact, could not bear the idea of leaving him to
another woman. Towards the end of the novel, we understand that she had tried to kill the
Princess twice – first by setting fire to her room during which the Princess’ maid
KumKum Kanwar lost her life, and second by poisoning her. The Princess survived both
these attempts. Leelawati, the Finance Minister Adinathji’s granddaughter, from her
childhood onwards considered the Prince to be her husband and tried to come back to
him even after her marriage to another person; but Maharaj Kumar could never accept
her. She was the only woman who could leap and fly into Maharaj Kumar's arms whenever or wherever she could. She had no inhibitions absolutely, she would openly declare him her husband. She tried to get back to him after Sugandha's death and sent him a letter of great importance, but destiny is strange, Maharaj Kumar had to finally seek solace only from the Little Saint.

After Babur's invasion, we find that the prince is all alone; now he decides to go back to the Little Saint. The epilogue suggests that his death was quite mysterious. "I am the missing page that is not missed, the hiatus that may be skipped" says the epigraph of the Epilogue. (Nagarkar 601). There were several stories about his disappearance; one among them was that the flautist embraced the Maharaj Kumar and he became invisible, "there was just the end of the Maharaj Kumar's turban, the Kesariya bana, showing outside the lower left edge of the Flautist's chest" (Nagarkar 603).

Finally, Maharaj Kumar becomes 'one' with the Flautist. His relationship with Lord Krishna had been very strong from the beginning. As a child, he grew up listening to the Krishna tales narrated by Kausalya, especially, the stories of Krishna hiding behind the bushes and watching the women having a bath in a pond, stealing their clothes etc. and Kausalya would discover him do the same thing and give him a proper beating. As Maharaj Kumar grew, he followed the Bhagavad Gita and the lessons and principles propounded in the holy book. During the years of ruling his kingdom of Mewar, he used to consider Lord Krishna "one of the greatest statesmen of all time and hoped that the people would learn the art of diplomacy and war from him" (Nagarkar 602). And as fate would have its final say, he got married to a Krishna bhakt. In the beginning, he did not adore her; their relationship was not one of adoration. He detested her, for her songs,
bhajans, or for getting a flock of people around her. When people around him showed disapproval for her actions, Maharaj Kumar even went to the extent of breaking her ektara into two. However, that did not provoke her. She sang without an ektara, which annoyed Maharaj Kumar even more. She moved in an immense ocean of love, patience and perseverance. Nothing could disturb her or her adoration for the Flautist. In fact, Maharaj Kumar used to wonder, why she adored only Lord Krishna and not the other Gods. And then he remembers that Krishna was usually the woman’s favourite. Later, when he began adoring his wife, he even disguised as the Flautist. There were several sessions of this appearance. He would dip himself in indigo\purple ink, take the appearance of Krishna, and dance to the music played by Mira. At one point, his skin became allergic to the indigo ink and developed blotches and eruptions. Finally, he became one with the Lord. For all his perseverance, it appeared as though the Lord himself was very happy with Maharaj Kumar that He decided to take him into Himself. Thus, Lord Krishna played a very important role in Maharaj Kumar’s life. Each and every point of his life was punctuated by the presence of Lord Krishna.

Nagarkar confines himself to major landmarks of sixteenth century India and creates a gallery of portraits. History is re-visited and Maharaj Kumar’s role in history is highlighted, as he becomes the hero of the novel with his sensitivities and imaginative powers. Fiction transcends history by offering a much richer and complex account of the society in which the characters live. The several intricacies found in this novel with regard to the characters of Maharaj Kumar and Mirabai cannot be found in history books. In a way, Nagarkar glorifies the past as he is fictionalizing it. The title of the novel is a reflection of Maharaj Kumar’s condition in the novel. ‘Cuckold’ as an epithet for
Maharaj Kumar is suggestive in two ways: one in the ordinary sense with respect to his second wife, Sugandha, who leaves him and moves on with Prince Vikramaditya; and two, with respect to Mira, who is not unfaithful to him in the normal sense, yet considers the Lord to be her husband. The title is very shocking when we look at it in this perspective. Mira, a saint, is the reason for her husband being called a 'cuckold'. He is the marginalized one, subjugated by his wife and seeking ways to break himself free from the paradigms of victimization, unlike, the earlier interpretations of the myth, where either Mira is portrayed as the victim or she is portrayed as one who rises above her condition and becomes a rebel. Maharaj Kumar is otherwise a very warm and affectionate person who is loved and respected by his people. He turned out to be a very good administrator too when the king had been away at a war and had given the responsibility of the kingdom to the prince. His youth and vibrancy appealed to everybody. His innovative ideas brought in many changes in the kingdom. His unconventional methods of warfare were appreciated by some of the ministers too. But his image was tarnished due to his wife Mira. People would hurl questions at him regarding his wife's singing and dancing in public (which was not supposed to be done by a Princess) and Maharaj Kumar would be highly embarrassed. Another question raised by the people is this: If Maharaj Kumar is not able to rule over his own wife, how will he rule a kingdom like Mewar? Thus, the Mira myth is de-mythicized here. The sacredness of the myth is lost. The very title of the novel demythicizes and humanizes the myth in a shocking, even outrageous, way. The books on Mirabai would focus only on her, her devotion to the Lord and her bhajans, thus raising her to the level of a myth. But here in this novel, Mira's myth is provided only as a sub-plot while the main plot of the novel is a narrative of the incidents
happening in the kingdom of Mewar, the narration being done by Mira’s husband, Maharaj Kumar. However, as I mentioned earlier, the chapters dedicated to Mirabai are a third person narrative with an epigraph provided at the beginning of every chapter. This might be a deliberate attempt on the part of the novelist to maintain the epic proportions of the myth.

**A Comparative Study**

John Vickery’s assumption that myth is a “matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically” (Vickery 1966, ix) is considered here. It is such a matrix that has been examined in this and the preceding chapters. The matrix has been seen to have taken three different forms in the novels discussed. Firstly, as a complete re-narration of a classical myth with the author naming his chosen mythological characters and settings according to the original ones and taking the postcolonial stance of questioning the role of the colonized or marginalized. This is found in M.T.Vasudevan Nair’s *Randamoozham* and Kiran Nagarkar’s *Cuckold*. In *Randamoozham*, the author takes the character of Bhima from the *Mahabharata* and gives him a voice. Bhima is the colonized here, colonized by the circumstances and the people around him. He has his own standpoint for everything, but nobody listens to him. However, the epic does not reveal that Bhima had his own sensibility. The sensibility is provided by the author in the novel. Similarly, in *Cuckold*, Nagarkar gives voice to Maharaj Kumar, the marginalized character in the original myth.

In the second type, we have a juxtaposition of sections narrating a myth and the others concerned with the contemporary world wherein a part of the mythology is dealt
with explicitly and it is given a contemporary setting. Here, both the myth and the postcolonial complement each other. This is evident in Krithika’s *Vasaveswaram*, Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *Arjun*, Sethu’s *Pandavapuram*, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* and Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*. In Krithika’s *Vasaveswaram*, the myth of Vasava is used to portray the incidents that happen in an ordinary village named after Vasava—Vasaveswaram. The colonizer-colonised attitude can be found in the relationship between Rohini, Chandrasekhara Iyer and Picchandi. In Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *Arjun*, the myth is taken from the *Mahabharata* and the story is that of a village in Bengal that had to deal with the problems of the India-Pakistan partition. Sethu’s *Pandavapuram* again takes myth from the *Mahabharata* and narrates a story of a colonized woman, Devi, who is colonized by the patriarchal society. Devi assumes the role of a Goddess to protect womankind. All her life she had yearned for freedom and she finally encounters it personified in men around her and thus the flights of fantasy between the real world and the imagined. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, both take several instances from the myths to portray the political condition of India. Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* also uses the myth to portray the condition of Devi, the protagonist of the novel.

In the third type, the author claims himself or is claimed by critics to be creating a new myth, the postcolonial condition helping it in the process. This is evident in Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, wherein the myth of Gandhi is explored to its fullest.

However, in all the novels, the authors have consciously used mythical situations and characters to portray a modern context. The authors have dramatized the novels in such a way so as to make the past a vital part of the present. The novels have been taken
for discussion in the chronological order of their publication to suit the purposes of the thesis. However, a pattern could be seen to emerge as the analysis was being done.

One such pattern is the order of increasing complexity and sophistication in their use of myth. For instance, in *Cuckold*, Nagarkar has addressed the issues that deal with the Mira myth and the circumstances that lead to Maharaj Kumar’s role as a cuckold, which a normal history book would not reveal. The whole idea of the novel is to de-mythicize the Mira myth, one that is a celebrated story in the pages of Amar Chitra Katha series and other written and oral accounts, wherein she is depicted as an ideal Hindu wife, bowing at the feet of an enthroned Bhojraj. As soon as her household duties are over, she would turn to her divine husband—her Gopala—whom she had brought with her from Merta. Thus, there is just this one myth and the whole process of de-mythification taking place in this novel. In Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, a new myth is created, the Gandhi myth, wherein Gandhi is elevated to the status of a divine being. Moorthy, the main character of the novel, is an embodiment of the ideals of Gandhi as he walks in the footsteps of Gandhi. In addition, the political condition of India favours the process of mythicizing history. In *Vasaveswaram*, the myth functions in the form of religious discourses narrated by the harikatha-man Subrahmanya Sastrigal. The story revolves around these harikathas, the characters either take refuge in them or revolt against them. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the protagonist Devi takes refuge in the myths which help her redefine her identity. Two women who help Devi in her quest for identity by connecting to the mythical stories are Devi’s grandmother and Mayamma. In *Pandavapuram*, the protagonist Devi relies entirely on the myth of Draupadi to justify the associations with her paramours. This novel is different from the other novels due to the psychological touch given to it by the
novelist. Devi, due to her troubled past, vows to protect her community from the hands of the male dominated society and to do this, she dons the garb of a Goddess. While Githa Hariharan’s Devi relates herself to the characters of Damayanti (while choosing Mahesh as her husband similar to Damayanti choosing Nala in a swayamwara), Gandhari (in the case of her mother sacrificing her heart’s desire to play the veena which is similar to Gandhari’s ultimate sacrifice to blindfold herself after learning that she has been married to a blind person), Amba (with respect to her cousin Uma’s marriage) and Ganga, Sethu’s Devi is preoccupied with Draupadi. However, both the protagonists want to break the ideology of the male paradigm and they are successful too. In the novel *Arjun*, the protagonist Arjun Raychoudhury is in a similar plight as that of Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*. There is a direct reference to the myth in terms of the name as well as the circumstances leading to the incidents in the novel. There is a political situation too that asserts the character’s predicament that gets him closer to the myth. But this is not the case with M.T. Vasudevan Nair’s *Randamoozham*, wherein the Bhima myth is explored to its fullest. Bhima, the not-so-important character in the *Mahabharata* in terms of his emotions (but very important for his strength), is presented as the most sensible of all the Pandavas in this novel. He expresses strong disapproval of several incidents and deeds that happened in the *Mahabharata*. The novelist redefines Bhima’s character in such a way that if Bhima had had the first turn, the *Mahabharata* would have been much different from what it is. However, in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, the protagonist’s quest for identity is similar to India’s quest for identity and to fulfill both, the novelist makes use of several myths both directly and indirectly. But Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* is the most ingenious narration of events in the form of
a parallel between the Indian political condition and the *Mahabharata*. Tharoor has cleverly satirized India’s political history that includes the partition and the independence movements and the Indian democracy by a deliberate use of the mythical narratives from the epic. What Tharoor has done, in fact, is design a third narrative, fusing the mythical and historical narratives, in the process demythicizing the myth and mythicizing history.

Draupadi’s character has seen different shades of portrayal in the novels taken for analysis. For instance, in *Randamoozham*, Draupadi is loved and adored by Bhima and though he has to wait for his second turn to bestow his affection on her, he does it with utmost care. The novelist also mentions the fact that whenever Draupadi expressed her desire to acquire something, Bhima would undergo any ordeal to fulfill it for her. Here, Draupadi is portrayed as one who is of extreme importance in Bhima’s life. But in Sethu’s *Pandavapuram*, Draupadi is shown as Panchali, the wife of five husbands and the protagonist taking refuge in this myth to justify her actions. While in *The Great Indian Novel*, Draupadi is a symbolic and allegorical character rather than a flesh-and-blood one. She is shown as the product of the union of India and the West in terms of boundaries and that of Jawaharlal Nehru and Edwina Mountbatten in terms of people, and she is named Draupadi Mokrasi. Her disrobing in the court by Dusshasana finds a parallel in the dusshasan (misrule) of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency.

Several attitudes on the part of the writers can be discerned in the analysis of the novels. One among them is the attitude of reverence, which is found in *Kanthapura* in terms of historical necessity and in *Vasaveswaram* in terms of societal issues. As the villagers of Kanthapura are deeply religious, Moorthy utilizes this reverence to God and mixes it with a nationalistic fervour in order to get their support for the independence
movement. Hence the mention of Kenchemma who is a deity with miraculous powers and the harikathas narrated by Jayaramachar that integrate history, religion and patriotism. Moorthy is the local God-incarnate while Gandhi is the national God-incarnate. In Vasaveswaram, the harikathas are the means for the myths to be narrated to the people of Vasaveswaram. The three harikathas are a reflection of the incidents that the villagers experience in their village. The reverence to God is found here too which is being exploited for the sake of the improvement of the village and its values or even to find solutions to the various problems faced by the villagers. Thus, the sanctity of the myth itself is kept inviolate. The characters are evaluated against the ideal of the mythical figures and either found to reach that ideal (as in the case of Kanthapura) or found wanting (as in the case of Vasaveswaram).

Another attitude is one of interrogation, which is found in M.T.Vasudevan Nair’s Randamoozham, Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel and Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night. In Randamoozham, Bhima interrogates certain decisions taken by his own brothers and also Kunti which is not found in the epic. His sensibility is that of a mature individual who evaluates the pros and cons of the situation in detail before taking a decision. He also questions the morality of the society of his time especially in the case of sharing Draupadi and the court scene when Draupadi was dragged by his cousin and all her husbands looked on helplessly at the happening. Bhima, though he wanted to help Draupadi, could not do so because he did not have the permission of his elder brother. We could say Nair evaluates the mythical characters by modern yardsticks, and finds them deficient. Saleem in Rushdie’s novel interrogates the burden of history upon him, even as his origins and life have a
Karna-like mystery. This burden is like a cross that he carries on his shoulders and it identifies itself with all the later incidents in his life. Thus, Saleem is both a victim and the executor of national history. Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* interrogates the traditional concept of *dharma*—should it be linked to religion only or should it be according to the social values and standards? With obvious narrations from the epic as well as the national history, Tharoor concludes that *dharma* is relative. Nevertheless, in Hariharan’s novel, the male-dominated society that victimizes the women is questioned. But the protagonist and her mother outgrow their hapless situation and seek a solution in the homecoming and the acceptance of the musical instrument, the veena, respectively.

An attitude of revaluation can be discerned in the novel *Cuckold*. Kiran Nagarkar has cleverly taken the instance of Maharaj Kumar to portray the helplessness of the prince, who is otherwise not a celebrated person in history, and his title that he earns by virtue of his wife. Here, two things happen at the same time. The readers sympathize with the prince because of his wife and he is given a dignity in his kingdom and celebrated in the pages of history, and at the same time, the role of Mira as his wife is downplayed and the myth of Mira has been de-sacralized. Thus there has been a revaluation of the Mira myth. Mira is discussed in history only with respect to her devotion to Lord Krishna. She has been elevated in the pages of history to the level of a myth and here in this novel, there has been a process of deflation of the myth.

There are similarities in *Kanthapura, Midnight’s Children* and *The Great Indian Novel* all of which have the form of oral narrative. While Saleem is the mouthpiece for the author in *Midnight’s Children*, V.V. is the oral narrator in *The Great Indian Novel* and in *Kanthapura*, the narrator is Achakka, the elderly woman who cleverly narrates the
transformation of the society into a politically conscious one. While Saleem claims that he has so many stories to be told, V.V. exclaims that there is no end to the stories in India. Both the narrators try to present their stories mixing their personal events with the political events of their country. This means of oral narrative in a way helps to de-centre the colonial contours of India and glorify the Indian systems, religious and political, that is, moralistic and patriotic.

Another similarity in the three novels is that they are related to the political/historical condition of India. All the three novels use myth to portray the national history. While Kanthapura creates a new myth of Gandhi, Midnight’s Children and The Great Indian Novel alternate between myth and reality in the narration of events. Certain incidents that were landmarks in the political history of India find a mention in the latter two novels—the Jallianwalabagh massacre, the partition, wars with China, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Emergency etc. In fact, Tharoor acknowledges his reading of the Rushdie text in his novel in an ingenious manner, “Children being born at inconvenient times of the night who would go on to label a generation and rejuvenate a literature” (Tharoor 239). He has also entitled his eighth book “Midnight’s Parents” as a parody of Rushdie’s novel. However, while in Midnight’s Children the story of Saleem is set as a parallel to the national events, in The Great Indian Novel; one notices a fusion of both the myth and the political narrative. For instance, in the incident revolving around Shantanu, Tharoor says, “Years later, inexplicably, the now middle-aged king returned from a trip to the river bank with a handsome lad named Ganga Datta, announced that he was his lost son, and made him heir-apparent; and though this was a position which normally required the approval of the British Resident, it was clear that the young man
possessed in abundant measure the qualities and the breeding required for the office of crown prince, and the Maharaja's apparently eccentric nomination was never challenged” (Tharoor 21-22).

Thus, there has been an attempt to re-write the past, especially the colonial past and deconstruct the colonial framework. Myths have largely contributed to the portrayal/interpretation of incidents in the novels discussed above; the postcolonial condition, an additional support in the process of interpretation. In the process, the primary characters in the myths are seen in a new light. The repressed characters in the myths have also been given a voice in some of the novels discussed above.