CHAPTER TWO

MYTH AND MYTH CRITICISM

It is believed that the early human, as he sought to understand and explain the forces of nature, articulated his/her speculations in the form of myths. Every region, community and social group of the ancient world possessed its own peculiar local myths, folktales and legends. However, as time passed on, these narratives were diffused over wide areas because they were relevant not only to a specific group or region, but were structured upon fundamental and universal aspects of human nature and conditions of life. They became a shared heritage of ancestral memories related consciously from one generation to another. Myth is the thread that holds the past, present and future together. The word ‘myth’ is highly speculative and chameleonic. A direct comprehensive definition of myth is not possible since a direct experience of myth has not been recorded. The English term ‘myth’ is derived from the Greek ‘muthos’ which means ‘word’ or ‘speech’ or ‘a tale or something one uttered’ or ‘any information transmitted verbally including truth and falsehood’ (Larue 5). The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics defines myth as “a story or a complex of story elements taken as expressing and therefore as implicitly symbolizing certain deep-lying aspects of human and trans-human existence” (Preminger ed. 538). This definition tries to draw a parallel between two viewpoints: one in which the myth is treated as a mode of consciousness, that is, a basic way of imagining experience and the other in which the myth is merely a story, a more popular form where anything mythical is considered false.

Myths record observations about the natural world. The purpose of a myth is not simply to describe something but to explain how it came into existence. This idea is
revealed in the definition given by the cultural historian and professor of English, Stephen Ausband: “tales that are accepted on the whole, as either true to historical fact or as reinforcing and demonstrating a society’s understanding of the truth about natural phenomena, and which are treated seriously by most members of the society” (Ausband 6). Thus, they form a part of the living tradition. According to him, no age can be without myths, as they are stories through which the age can see itself. As human beings always connect themselves with the goings-on of the universe, both their real and imagined relationships with nature find an outlet in the form of myths. These myths reflect a world that is meaningful and orderly and when they are outgrown due to the changes in the ideas of human beings, they have to be discarded or altered or replaced by new ones. Ausband believes that myths are stories “that will define us to ourselves” (Ausband 6). Some mythologists define myth as a literary vehicle or kind of literature involving divine beings. In such a case, they refer to what gods and goddesses do in their own realms as well as in the world of men. James G. Frazer, the Scottish anthropologist, believes that there must have been a vegetation-ritual, a central activity from which all mythologies were derived. Alan Dundes, Professor of Anthropology and Folklore-studies, University of California, regards myth as “a sacred narrative explaining how world and man came to be in their present form” (Dundes 1). He reiterates that myth is a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world and it expresses and confirms the society’s religious values and norms.

Myths are also defined in terms of human consciousness. Sigmund Freud defines myth as “representative illusions produced entirely as a result of psychic projection, (which) include our ideas of immortality, retribution (and) the world after death, all of
which are simply reflections of our inner psyche” (quoted in Ruthven 17-18). Freud names them “endopsychic myths” because the inner mind stimulates illusions that are projected outwards in the form of myths. Therefore, while a few myth critics talk about ‘landscapes’ as the potential womb of mythology, Freud considers ‘mindscapes’ as the means for myth’s origin. He looks upon myths as precipitates of unconscious processes. He ignores the basis of myths often on reality. Nevertheless, for Carl G. Jung, the contents of the collective unconscious are ‘archetypes’ and these archetypes produce archetypal images familiar in myths, dreams, art and literature.

Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, talks of a pattern common to all the myths—“monomyth”—and he reiterates that “myths arise just as dreams arise [...] in man’s subconscious mind which deals with hopes and fears that have scarcely been articulated” (quoted in Ausband 15). The French sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss also acknowledges the unconscious element in myths when he defines myths as “not stories which are made up voluntarily and arbitrarily but that they have a compulsive hold on the human mind and manifest themselves in the mind” (quoted in Munz 5). He also believes that myths ought to be decoded as they are in a language not easily understood and therefore, they should be translated into a language that can be understood. According to him, myths should be interpreted serially, that is, each myth should be broken up into its constituent phases and these phases must be taken to be a series of messages with the same meaning. Thus, in his structural study of myth, all its versions are taken into consideration.

Richard Chase (1904-1988), the American scholar, defines myth as “an aesthetic device for bringing the imaginary but powerful world of preternatural forces into a
manageable collaboration with the objective (that is, experienced) facts of life in such a way as to excite a sense of reality amenable to both the unconscious passions and the conscious mind" (quoted in Murray 276). Thus, myth becomes a mediator between the external reality and the internal variations of man. Myth often lives on the feather line between fantasy and reality. Myth also serves as a pattern to all the aspirations of human beings. Therefore, externalization of the inner impulse in the form of myth provides the basis for a sharing of the inner experience. As myths originate from the depths of human nature, they appeal to the depths of human mind. Myths are also defined in terms of an unveiling of the mystery of human beings as well as nature. Mircea Eliade, the Romanian scholar, defines myth in such terms: “the myth defines itself by its own mode of being. It can only be grasped, as a myth, in so far as it reveals something as having been fully manifested, and this manifestation is at the same time creative and exemplary, since it is the foundation of a structure of reality as well as of a kind of human behaviour” (Eliade 1963, 14).

Sometimes, myths develop in response to important social needs and therefore are accepted universally. They can be viewed as literature that develops out of a concern for survival and the desire to understand the implications of what it means to be human. Through myth, human beings are able to give order and structure to their world and perhaps bring meaning or purpose to an existence that otherwise may appear meaningless. Myths can be understood in terms of the individual’s awareness of power outside his/her own self. They enable the individual to understand his/her place in the world and to grasp the dimensions of being human. Thus, they provide exemplary models
for life. They are the mind at play, a form of primitive science and a way of maintaining cultural identity.

Myths, in reality, often support the existing social structure, patterns of belief and conduct and the current interpretation of the world. They may serve to maintain the stability of the society, which may be felt to be moving towards its doom. Many people feel that the world today is bereft of moral values and it has become a necessity that myths have to be evoked to hold the strings of culture together. Myths protect and transmit cultural values and they become the key to morality, value structure and acceptable behavioural patterns of the society. The world today is fast changing and filled with insecurity. Myths, however, make it easier to face the insecure world. In other words, if a society has to survive the several challenges imposed upon it, it has to depend on mythical perspectives because they provide a stronghold of sustenance. Several concepts like patriarchy, matriarchy, marriage and other such social institutions are shaped by mythologies. Thus, we understand that myths serve as models for the orientation of self-development and the development of the society in general.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF MYTH-STUDIES

Myth-studies began as early as the fifth century B.C. The Greek philosophers had made their first attempts at the interpretation of Greek myths. They, however, considered these myths as describing events that were unlikely and illogical. The importance of myth, which was grasped in the later ages, was not understood by the Greek philosophers. They interpreted myths as allegories. There were multitudes of interpretations for the same god. For instance, Empedocles, during the fifth century B.C.
asserted that Zeus was an allegory of fire while a few other mythologists considered Zeus as a representation of the sky; and a few others gave an abstract quality to Zeus by regarding him as reason. Myths were also considered allegorical moral instruction. For instance, the Greek biographer Plutarch's (1st-2nd century A.D.) treatment of Homer's *Iliad* (believed to have been written around eighth century B.C.) and *Odyssey* (end of eighth century B.C.) held that myths embodied in those works would teach marital fidelity.

Thales (c.640-596 B.C.), a Greek philosopher, is considered the world's first myth philosopher in the modern sense. According to him, water is the first and universal principle. He also believed in a new process of rationalism. For him the mythical start is from the amniotic fluid where every human being begins life. He also interpreted myths as allegories of natural phenomena and mythical beings as personifications of the elements of nature. Other Greek thinkers like Pythagoras (6th century B.C.), Epicharmus (6th-5th century B.C.) and Socrates (c.470-399 B.C.) also adhered to the natural allegory concept in their interpretations of myth.

Euhemerus, a Greek writer of the fourth to third centuries B.C., in *Sacred History* (believed to have been written around 300 B.C.), considered gods to be human beings who either deified themselves or were deified by their contemporaries or descendants. In this book, he describes a visit to an imaginary island called Panchaea—somewhere in the Indian Ocean—where he learns from an inscription inside the temple of Zeus that Zeus was a Cretan by birth who travelled in the East and was proclaimed a god there before returning home and dying in Crete (quoted in Ruthven 5). Euhemerism is the movement that believes in the idea that the supreme god of the pagans had been human. Later on,
Christian authors took up Euhemerism and applied it widely throughout the Middle ages. The Euhemeristic interpretation was applied even to the Old Icelandic myths. For instance, the Danish cleric Saxo Grammaticus (c.1150-1220) in his Gesta Danorum (c. 1185) treated the Scandinavian gods as if they were historical characters. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, the Danish historian Suhm wrote of gods as military leaders who came to Denmark from the East and became deified. Thus, Euhemerism was applied to myths of several cultures.

During the Middle ages, the mythologists were interested in the interpretation of Ovid and Virgil; here again, the myths were treated as allegories. The same practice continued even during the Renaissance. The Italian author Boccaccio (1313-1375), for instance, treated ancient myths as allegories in Genealogy of the Gods (1360). He also believed that myths embody natural truths, which were hidden within them. However, the humanists saw myths as allegories of moral values or human feelings. The English scientist and philosopher, Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), in his book Wisdom of the Ancients (1619), considered myths to be allegories of philosophical truth. Rationalists such as Voltaire, during the eighteenth century, dismissed classical mythology as irrational and “deliberate attempts by the priestly class to mislead humanity” (quoted in Ausband 10). Voltaire was, in fact, in favour of reason as a guide to understanding and regarded myths as being not reasonable.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Romanticism developed new techniques of interpreting and studying myths, which, in a way, also highlighted the inconsistencies of the older interpretations. The Romanticists regarded poetic myths as a storehouse of human knowledge. Myths were considered truths created by people and
they were greeted with admiration and awe. The interpretations were given in the form of poetic descriptions of nature that alluded to myths. Some of the important mythologists during this period were the German poet Uhland (1787-1862), the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), the German psychologist and philosopher Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) and the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945). Uhland had written a book on the Scandinavian God Thor and reiterated that only a poet can completely understand a myth. Schelling’s *Philosophy of Mythology* (1857) published posthumously, traces all myths to a single origin in monotheism. His understanding of myth is from ‘within’. However, according to Wundt, “myth and symbol are the beginning and the end of religion, for as long as myth is alive, it is reality and not a symbol of religious ideas” (quoted in Kamenskij 25). Myth stands at the beginning, and symbol at the end of religious development. He also believes that a mythical idea is a reality and not just a symbol. Cassirer’s idea of myth is connected to Schelling’s idea in the sense that he refused to acknowledge myth as allegories, symbols, metaphors or signs, instead, myth is seen as “fully objective reality” though it includes religion, magic etc. For him, myth does not depict an object; it is the object itself.

Nature Mythologists, on the other hand, began to follow poets in treating myths as pictures of nature and gods as personifications of heavenly bodies. The leader of this school is the German, Max Muller (1823-1900), a professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford from 1868 until his death in 1900. He had devoted much attention to comparative mythology and the comparative study of religions. Since he was a linguist, he introduced linguistic methods of analysis into mythology. He was the first person to suggest the notion of the “fundamental metaphor” which is a result of the human passions being
projected on to cosmic bodies. In fact, the nature mythology school is divided into two branches—one, comprising those who adhere to the sun (the Solar branch) and the other, whose adherence is to the moon, clouds, storms, thunder, lightning and other phenomena (the Lunar branch). Muller belonged to the Solar branch; and thus saw all myths as figures for the Sun. According to Muller, myths cannot mean what they seem to mean. “What they really do mean [is] found in a combination of nature mythology with the theory that myth is a sort of disease of language” (quoted in Kamenskij 26). Kamenskij in *Myth*, gives one instance of Muller’s linguistic interpretations in mythology:

To explain the Greek myth of Daphne, the maiden who turned into a laurel tree (Daphne means ‘laurel’ in Greek) to save herself from the amorous advances of Apollo, Muller adduced the Sanskrit cognate with Daphne that means ‘dawn’. Originally, he argued, the Greek word also meant ‘dawn’. Daphne therefore personifies the dawn, and a pretty picture of nature results: Dawn (Daphne) is pursued by the Sun (Apollo) and eventually disappears into the earth (becomes a laurel tree). (Kamenskij 26)

However, Muller and his school were objects of ridicule though the later mythologists did take up their ideas of interpretation. Muller was criticized for his far-fetched linguistic theory of the genesis of myth.

One of the theories that predominated the world for a long time in the study of myths was the Ritual Theory, which believes that “all myths are verbal accounts invented to accompany religious rituals. That is, primitive man during religious rituals accompanied the ‘things done’ (ritual) by ‘things said’ (myth), which were narratives
During the nineteenth century, these myth critics concentrated on the myths and rituals of the culturally backward people. Sir James Frazer is regarded as the forerunner of this school. *The Golden Bough*, which runs into twelve volumes, is a mass of data that establishes connections between myths and rituals. Frazer also incorporated magic into the study of myths. For him, myths, like magic, are a primitive form of science, whose purpose is to explain rituals. Ritual origins were seen in the cultural walks of life and all these rituals were texts for myth. However, the major concern of *The Golden Bough* is to produce a theory of mythology. Frazer also adheres to the Euhemeristic theory as he suggests that myths are distorted recollections of history. The Ritual theory was a great success due to three main factors, as listed by Kamenskij:

1. The ethnographical data newly made available to scholars revealed the close connection among various elements of primitive culture, especially between myth and ritual.

2. It was always possible to find among known rituals some interpretations of myth.

3. There was an increased interest in the function of myth in primitive society that accompanied the acquisition of new data and finding out the essence of myth. (Kamenskij 30)

The Ritual Theory led to the Social Force Theory wherein the mythologists study the peculiar function of myth in the primitive society. The major proponent of this theory is the British ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), who showed that “myth is an important social force which undergrids the structure, laws, and moral values of a
society. It expresses and codifies beliefs, lends prestige to tradition, guides practical activity, and teaches rules of behaviour. It pervades all aspects of life, including, of course, ritual” (quoted in Kamenskij 30). Malinowski, in fact, spent many years among the aborigines of a Melanesian tribe called Trobriand and studied how myth becomes a vital social force. He found those islanders very pragmatic right down to the roots of their mythology. He was also a functionalist who interpreted myths based on the social, moral, and psychological functions of myths.

A new wave of interpretation of myths arose with the arrival of psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud. Myth was now interpreted as a symbol. Freud applied his concept of the origins and nature of neuroses to explain the origins and nature of ancient mythology. He rejected the idea that myths personify natural phenomena, and turned to human beings for an explanation. He made an analogy between dream symbols of modern man and the symbols contained in myths. Just as dreams are wish fulfillments for human beings, myths were also wish fulfillments for the ancient man. According to him, all myths are “sex symbols (and) distorted expressions of the libido of primitive man which assumed the form of fantasies as a result of repressing anti-social impulses” (quoted in Reinhold 18). Thus, myths were understood as mass dreams, expressions of a collective subconscious mind that is revealed in dreams together with the personal subconscious. For instance, Freud considers the Narcissus myth as a mode of neurotic inversion, which he first identified as narcissism in Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘Mona Lisa’.

Freud’s theories were taken up by Carl Jung and expanded in his analysis of myths. However, for Jung, myths were collective archetypes rather than symbols of individual fantasies. According to Jung, all people possess an inborn ability to create in
the subconscious certain common symbols, which he termed ‘archetypes’. These archetypes revealed themselves in dreams, which express the ‘collective unconscious’. In addition, this ‘collective unconscious’ is a repository of myth. The similarity of many myths in plot and characters, the attraction and persistence of myth arise from the common store in the unconscious of all men. Sometimes Jung’s archetypes have a religious content unlike Freud’s myths, which have a sexual content. Jung’s archetypes can be expressed only figuratively. His psychotherapy correlates the mythic archetypes with the dreams of neurotic patients. For instance, archetypes like ‘mother and child’, ‘journey of the hero’, ‘suffering’, ‘rites of passage’, ‘the healer’ etc., are basic human motifs inherited by the modern man from primitive times. They survive and reappear in modern man’s dreams through ‘the collective unconscious’. Jung correlates these mythic archetypes with the dreams of neurotic patients and thus psychoanalyses ancient mythical characters. Though he has been accused by literary critics of ignoring the history and nature of myths, his theories did have enormous influence on literary studies.

The basic difference between the Freudian and Jungian approach is that Freud interprets the symbol as a generalization from a particular; for example, ‘pits’, ‘boxes’, etc. symbolize ‘womb’ and Jung regards the symbol as the particularization of a general; that is, ‘womb’ is the womb of a Great Mother, the symbol of eternal fertility and nourishing care (Day 288). In addition, while Freud and his followers regard myth as infantile and neurotic-psychotic, Jung and his followers consider myth as vital to man’s creativity and maturation.

Structuralism was another influential approach to myth-studies. According to the structural theory of Claude Levi-Strauss (published in Structural Anthropology in 1963),
"all myths in all cultures have a single function—to bridge contradictions between polarized extremes of tensions" (quoted in Reinhold 19). Levi-Strauss called his method a scientific one wherein every myth can be analyzed as a coded structure to mediate the binary opposites like “sky-earth, up-down, south-north, summer-winter, sun-moon, life-death, fire-water, warm-cold, male-female and so on” (Kamenskij 35). Thus, he analyses myth into constituent elements and from these, selects the ones that can be placed in opposition. For Levi-Strauss, a myth is the sum of all its variants. Thus, myth like language will transmit some information through its structure. Levi-Strauss’ ideas can be summarized in two models: one, in which “he holds that the content of any myth is a logical model, reducible by binary analysis into terms of oppositions and mediators, thus an abstract model of human thought, an algebraic formula”; in the second, “the content of myth is the mediation of a concrete opposition, describing the resolution of some real contradiction” (quoted in Kamenskij 38). Kamenskij gives one instance of this model: ‘hunting’ is a mediator between life and death as it involves killing to preserve life.

Claude Levi-Strauss’ ideas came up as a theory when the theory of another French mythologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939) was seriously questioned. Levy-Bruhl had come up with the idea that primitive thought, which is ‘prelogical’, is a kind of thinking that proceeds from absurd premises and tolerates impermissible contradictions. For him, primitive thought is mysticism or submission to belief in supernatural forces. Levy-Bruhl, however, was the first “to investigate the psychology of culturally backward people on the assumption that it differs from modern psychology and must be looked at from a consistently historical point of view” (quoted in Kamenskij 40). Nevertheless, Levy-Bruhl was constantly under attack as he was a philosopher at heart and therefore,
critics point out that his primary interest always lay in the history of human consciousness.

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) belongs to the most significant stage of myth-studies. He believes that myth appears in religious contexts as a revelation of the society’s spiritual authority and its temporal power. In fact, human beings find their lives based on these myths. He finds a pattern common to all the myths and he calls this pattern the ‘monomyth’. According to Campbell, “myths arise just as dreams arise [...] in man’s subconscious mind which deals with hopes and fears that have scarcely been articulated” (quoted in Ausband 15). Campbell divides the mythological world into four parts:

1. The psychology and archaeology of myth: myths have a structuring principle based on the psyche.
2. Oriental mythology: this explains the myths of the Orient.
3. Occidental mythology: this explains the myths of the Occident.
4. Poetic mythology: the history of mythology includes “the true poetry of the past”. (quoted in Murray 31)

He also explains the three categories of Mythology Proper in his Introduction to *The Masks of God* (1964): daemonic, metaphysical and humanistic. According to the daemonic version, all Gods and Daemons represent something with a life and consciousness of its own; this something is a force, not a shape and it works invisibly. According to the metaphysical version, which achieved its popularity in medieval India, China, and Japan, the hermit’s mind has intuitive insights into the mystery of the universe. According to the humanistic version, which is popular in the Occident, morality
and religion, art and prophecy, are human and are to be read in terms of psychology. (quoted in Murray 37).

Besides all these myth-studies, one other method of analysis survived for some period of time—the comparative method. This method concentrated on the parallels and origins of myths and motifs rather than their meanings. This method started as early as the age of Herodotus (fifth century B.C.) who was keen on finding the similarities among myths of different regions. One among the later comparative mythologists is Max Muller whose famous *Comparative Mythology* was published in 1856. As mentioned earlier in the context of nature mythology, Muller interpreted nearly all the myths as poetic descriptions of the sun’s behaviour. The followers of the school compared the languages of many cultures and the myths of many primitive peoples to unlock the secrets of ancient mythology. For instance, there are several flood myths in the world: the story of Noah which is the Biblical myth, the Indian myth ‘Manu and the fish’, the Babylonian myth ‘utnapishtim’, the Aztec myth ‘Tata and Nena’, the Greek myth ‘Deucalion’, the North American flood myths, the flood myth of the Incas and the flood myth of Egypt. A comparative study of all these myths suggests that the core is the same; they only take up these different manifestations in different parts of the world. The study of Sanskrit and research in comparative linguistics led to the Indo-European myth theory. According to this theory, “all known myths and folk tales survive from an immense body of original myths of an Aryan (or Indo-European) parent people, the ancestors of the Greeks, Romans, Hindus, Germans, Celts” (Reinhold 12). A parallel for any myth or motif could easily be found in the mythology of other people. If both are historically connected, then there is no doubt about this parallel. If not, then with difficulty, a parallel can be traced.
A few other myth theories were prevalent during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but they did not make it to the forefront. One theory that developed due to the comparative method of analysis is the Diffusion theory. The major proponents of this theory were Samuel Bochart (1599-1667), Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), Robert Marsham (1708-1797) and John Spencer (1630-1693) who believed that “all myth everywhere was simply a corruption and misunderstanding of the ancient Hebrew scriptures” (Day 27). In the nineteenth century, Theodor Benfey (1809-1881) suggested that the myths were produced in a few myth-creating areas such as India and then they passed through contact between cultures during the earliest times. Another theory is the Polygenesis theory, according to which, the similarities or parallels between myths are spontaneous because of the tendency of the human mind to react in the same way to similar conditions and experiences. That is, the societies that pass through the same stages of development produce similar myths. One of the chief advocates of this theory is Adolf Bastian (1826-1905). Another outcome of the comparative method of analysis is Pan-Babylonism, which considers the cosmogony and astronomy of ancient Babylon as the basis of myths all over the world. Another such offshoot is the view of Sophus Bugge (1833-1907), a Norwegian linguist, folklorist and mythologist, who derived Eddic myths from Christian and late Hellenistic narratives supposedly picked up by the Vikings in their raids on the British Isles. However, both these offshoots could not be sustained due to their inherent absurdities.
MYTH IN RELATION TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

Classical mythology supplies the contemporary society with an abundance of powerful images, concepts, themes and terms. These myths have been revitalized to suit the modern thought. With the emergence of several disciplines like science, arts, music and literature, many artists, writers and technologists have turned to the classical myths for inspiration and imagery. In fact, myths too have adapted themselves to conform to the altered ideas sparked by intellectual revolutions and technological developments. Myth shares a special relationship with disciplines like history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, astrology, astronomy, biology, geology, fine arts, magic and literature.

Myth is considered the product of oral history passed down from one generation to another. Myth can be historicized and history can be mythicized. There are myths that are based on certain facts in history, like, the Jesus Christ myth, which is considered historical too. A few mythologists believe that myth is a true story, that is, history, and that its contents are an account of events that really took place. It is also believed that myth is sacred history because of the concrete sacral forces that set it going. Some mythologists, however, believe that myth may not be history in actuality, but Para-history, an inevitable branch of history. F.H. Underhill (1889-1971), a Canadian historian and political thinker, is of the view that myth is meta-history, something that is beyond normal history. Myth is also considered to be natural history as it talks about the goings-on in the universe. History usually deals with factual data. The events described in history are those that relate to and affect groups of people and the principal characters are usually the leaders or heroes of the group. Historians interpret and judge these events too. However, mythic history is the interpretation of events as acts of divine beings or as
affected by them. Such an interpretation results in a heightening of the significance of the event. If there are conflicts, the outcome of these conflicts is apprehended as the result of human strategy in history; but in mythology, the outcome is an expression of divine will and judgement. Nevertheless, a few of those important events that took place in history were most decisive in the formation of the myths. Northrop Frye (1912-1991) believes that when a historian’s scheme gets to a certain point of comprehensiveness, it becomes mythical in shape. Linking myth with history, Frye has talked about three kinds of historical myths:

1. romantic historical myths in which the myth is related to a quest or pilgrimage to a city of God or a classless society.
2. comic historical myths, which talk about progress through evolution or revolution.
3. tragic historical myths, which detail decline or fall. (quoted in Reinhold 30)

However, one should not forget that while history is the actuality of the event, the mythic idea is a part of the conception of an event.

Mythology is considered a secret philosophical system because several philosophical and moral doctrines are embedded in myths. Myths were regarded as concepts to preserve the authority of tradition and the moral codes of the society. In the sphere of philosophy, myth attempts to explain ‘why’ things happen and ‘what’ can be done to either prevent or enhance them. The life of early man was filled with insecurity, confusion and anxiety; therefore, myths served the function of reducing the tensions and maintaining the stability and continuity of a way of life. Myths served as philosophical doctrines especially in the case of tensions springing from interpersonal relationships,
both familial and extra-familial. The daily hazards and frustrations of primitive society, which were often beyond human understanding and control, were the generative forces that brought myths into being. The mythologies were a repertory of guiding patterns for all aspects of life. Bronislaw Malinowski in *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926) reiterates that myth "[...] expresses, enhances and codifies belief, it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man" (Malinowski 90). Myths were also considered divine truths and mysteries apparent only to the wise. For instance, the Biblical myths were representations of moral codes and rules of conduct that could be easily imposed upon the society. The practice is still followed in contemporary societies. Nevertheless, as J.F. Bierlein suggests, as we move from mythos to logos, "the passage [is] from a world view based on a universally accepted myth to philosophical speculation about the human place in the universe" (Bierlein 300). However, as recent theories developed, myths were no longer a moral code, but a matter of 'mind' and 'being'.

As several societies exist in this world, several myths also exist. Myths have been so ingrained into people's lives that the fullness of their lives depends on their local mythology. In fact, a few myths arise based on the living conditions of the society. According to the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), "religion and myth to survive and to grip human hearts must preserve the family and clan structure, providing cement for essential relationships and tabus for injurious relationships, insuring the fullest strength and continuation of the foundations of that society and its harmonious and productive life" (quoted in Day 209). That is, if a society has to survive amidst several challenges, it has to depend on some of these mythical perspectives because they provide
a strong hold of sustenance. The concept of patriarchy, matriarchy, marriage and other such social institutions are shaped by mythologies. For instance, the Amazonians believed in matriarchy in their primitive culture. The same matriarchal society is still found in the present Amazon. Martin S. Day reiterates that an archaic society is a traditional society and therefore myths play a decisive role in bestowing an elevated prestige, enhanced value and higher moral ideal on their customs and practices. Thus, the relationship between myth and society is a mutual one.

As mentioned earlier, classical mythology has greatly influenced psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung who, in turn, based their theories on myths. Freud found similarities between the subconscious drives of his neurotic patients, particularly as expressed in their dreams, and the themes contained in Greek myths. According to him, the ideas of immortality and retribution are reflections of our inner psyche. For instance, the Oedipus myth wherein Oedipus unknowingly killed his father and married his mother—the term Oedipal Complex was used by Freud for a mental illness characteristic of a son’s excessive love for his mother. Similarly, the Electra Complex characterizes a daughter’s excessive love for her father. The myth of Narcissus—Narcissus is the handsome, young Greek who fell in love with his own reflection—the term ‘Narcissism’ is used to describe abnormal self-love as the basic emotional root of homosexuality. Medea Complex is another term used in psychology, which characterizes a mother’s hatred or death wish for her children, with accompanying unconscious desire for revenge against the father. Jung, nevertheless, regards the images that appear in dreams and fantasies bearing similarity to universal motifs found in religions, myths and legends. His characteristic archetypal figures are the anima, animus, shadow and self.
The names by which we know the constellations, planets and stars are the mythological ones given to them by the Greeks. The planets of our solar system are named after the ancient mythic gods. Many stars and constellations are also associated with mythic gods and heroes. In fact, the Milky Way Galaxy is connected to a myth of Hera, and Centaur, Cerberus and Dolphin constellations are connected to the myth of Orion. The twelve major constellations which form the Zodiac are also named after mythical animals. In India too, there are myths of humans turning into stars or constellations, e.g. Dhruva or Trissanku.

By 1891, when the first photographic method of astronomical exploration was invented, about three hundred and twenty asteroids had been named after mythological figures. The satellites of planet Saturn and Jupiter were named after mythical generation of the Titans—Hyperion, Tethys, Rhea, Phoebe, Europa, Callisto, Amaltheia etc. The planetoids close to Jupiter were named after the Trojans—Achilles, Patroclus, Priam, Troilus, Ajaz etc. With the advent of Space Science, spacecrafts and propulsion rockets took names from classical mythology. For instance, the individually manned flights sent to space to obtain data on space travel are termed "Project Mercury" after the messenger of Gods. The first such orbital flight, in 1962, carrying astronaut John H. Glenn Jr., was in a Mercury capsule launched by an Atlas rocket. The subsequent two manned flights were named "Project Gemini" (Twins).

With the modern systematization of the biological sciences, mythology got its link with biological sciences. When societies completely enveloped themselves in natural surroundings, trees and plants became the central figures of myth. Tree worship was very common in the Rajput area of India, ancient Middle East, Egypt, South Africa and even
The Biblical Tree myth is widely talked about in mythological circles, as it is symbolic of the Fall of Man, its motives, the event and finally its consequences. Perhaps the most revered tree is the Bodhi tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment. The tree is also considered a protecting womb and a saviour. Similarly, plants and bushes were also mythologized. Perhaps, the most sacred flower in the world is the lotus. Lotus is supposed to possess a maternal womb and therefore it symbolizes womanhood. The mythic, therefore, considers woman and lotus as “true sisters” sharing the same function and fulfilling it in similar ways. Animals have also been a part of mythology. The aquatic animals have had a lot of significance in earlier mythology. For instance, Fish is symbolic of fertility due to its reproductive capacities. In Pacific myths, the crab is symbolized as the “Terrible Mother” as it snatches the souls of the dead on their way to paradise. Tales of mermaids have always fascinated mythologists. The seal is attributed feminine characteristics too. However, for the ancient Greeks, the most favourable and luck-bringing mythicized sea creature is the dolphin. Apollo Delphinius (“dolphin-like”) indicates a dolphin-god ancestry as the temple of Apollo at Delphi had carvings of dolphins upon its walls. The whale has also been mythicized among the Eskimos and the peoples of the Pacific. Terrestrial animals are mythicized too. For instance, the cow is symbolic of feminine nurture, the bull is the father figure, the horse is symbolic of power and speed (Asvin—Indian mythological god), and the monkey is a symbol of nobility and courage (Hanuman in Indian mythology).

The human anatomy is also named from classical mythology. For instance, “the first cervical vertebra of the neck, which supports the head, is called the Atlas [...] named
after the Greek god Atlas who supported the earth on the shoulders; the term Achilles tendon [is applied] to the sinew above the heel [...] named after the Greek God Achilles” (Reinhold 5). In Greek mythology, when Achilles was born, Thetis tried to make him immortal by dipping him in the river Styx. Since she held him by one heel, which remained untouched by the water of Styx, that part remained mortal. As a result, during the Trojan War, he was finally killed by an arrow in the heel, the one place where he could be mortally wounded. For this reason, any weak point in an otherwise solid defence is called an ‘Achilles heel’. In human anatomy, the strong tendon that connects the muscles of the Calf of the leg with the heel bone is called the ‘Achilles tendon’. The coloured disc of the eye surrounding the pupil is called the Iris, after the Greek goddess Iris, who served as a messenger of the gods. She specialized in bearing messages from the gods to human beings, and to do this, she frequently had to descend from heaven to earth. The logical stairway by which this might be done was the ‘rainbow’ and ‘iris’ is the Greek word for ‘rainbow’.

Even before Geology developed as an aspect of science, Geomythology was prevalent as a part of mythology. Several myths were based on the landscape, earthquakes, volcanoes and the atmospheric conditions. The whole globe itself was considered Mother Earth and the caves, her womb. In fact, every feature of the earth’s surface is attributed to a supernatural agency. However, the major categories of geomythological accounts include land formations, earthquakes, volcanoes and floods. According to mythology, “the landscape is the product of willful supernatural beings” (Day 396). One instance of land formation from Indian mythology is ‘Gaurishankar’, the highest of Indian Glacier caps. The myth behind this is as follows: “the earth mother,
Gauri, divinely paired with Shiva to dispatch precious waters of life from the dazzling top of the world to the famished plains below” (Day 396). Earthquakes were considered the work of a subterranean beast whose movements cause the shaking of the earth. Floods also carry along with them several mythical ideas. Generally, floods are associated with divine wrath over human taboo violations, human carelessness or human viciousness. The flood myth is also symbolic of a wiping clean of creation to permit a fresh recreation. Thus, mythology intertwines with Geology too.

One way in which the divine can be made real to the imagination is by identifying it in terms of objects that have dimension and form, outline and substance and colour and texture. This was exactly why the painters and sculptors started depicting gods and goddesses in forms that could be grasped and held by the mind. The impact of art can be profound and it can affect the way in which individuals view themselves and their society. Thus, the human relationship with the cosmos was given an identity by these painters and sculptors. Scenes depicting aspects of a myth often adorned the walls of sanctuaries, places of worship and other such public places of interest. Thus, the artist makes a statement in his/her work of art and that mythic statement is again open to varying interpretation by individuals who internalize what they view. On the other hand, the twentieth century painters and sculptors also sought inspiration and motifs from classical mythology. For instance: Picasso has been deeply influenced by the classic myths, using them, for example, in his painting *Ulysses and the Sirens* and in many ceramic pieces with Greek fauns and nymphs as subjects.

Magic, according to Malinowski, is the most important and mysterious aspect of primitive man’s pragmatic attitude to reality. Magic is found wherever the elements of
chance, accident and danger play a decisive role. Magic also provides the main controlling power in the pursuit of game. It helps in the bridging-over of gaps and inadequacies in situations that are not completely mastered by man. When ordinary circumstances fail human beings, magic helps them with a definite success. Myths provide worth and validity to the performance of magic. Malinowski provides an example of this connection between myth and magic with regard to the 'magic of love'. In one of the Melanesian tribes, there lived a brother and sister along with their mother. The brother had prepared a love potion for somebody else, which his sister drank by mistake. Overcome by passion, she seduces him and when they realize their mistake, they die together. An aromatic herb grew through their skeletons and the tribe believes that this herb forms “the most powerful ingredient in the substances compounded together and used in love magic” (Malinowski 85). Thus, magic is also a part of mythology and vice versa.

Myth is very closely connected to literature. A few mythologists believe that myth became literature through intermediary forms like legends, folktales, fairy-tales, ballads etc., while a few others believe that metaphor is the linking unit. The German author Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) is of the opinion that mythology and poetry are one and inseparable. According to him, if people believe that mythology is characteristic of a particular place, they should also accept that such mythology is preserved in a highly sophisticated literary form. Thus, when we read Euripides or Ovid, we have to remember that they are literature made out of myths.

Myths are treated as serious commentaries on contemporary life. Classical myths were revitalized to bring out this effect. Authors, poets and dramatists usually went back
to Greek and Roman myths for plots, symbols and themes to illumine the present through the myths of the past. According to Meyer Reinhold, such a practice would give “heightened significance to the pettiness and ugliness of contemporary life through contact with the heroic grandeur of man portrayed in many myths” (Reinhold 400). Thus, mythical heritage becomes eternal models to provide a broader view of man transcending a specific time. Beginning from the Renaissance, English literature has made prolific use of classical mythology and writers have found in myths powerful metaphors to describe their own contemporary issues and dilemmas (e.g. Tennyson’s and Joyce’s Ulysses, Arnold’s Empedocles or Eliot’s Tiresias).

According to T.S.Eliot, myth in literature “[...] is simply a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history [...]” (quoted in Reinhold 400). Therefore, myth can also be used as objects of satire in literature. Along with it, sometimes, the basic story of a myth is transposed to a contemporary setting with characters wearing modern clothing and using modern idioms. One instance of this is Marc Connelly’s play The Green Pastures (1930), which is a re-interpretation of the Biblical myth. In this play, Jesus Christ is portrayed as a Black, smoking cigarettes and wearing modern clothes; however, the incidents are similar to the ones narrated in the Bible.

Sometimes, a re-interpretation could also suggest an existential point of view, like for example, Jean-Paul Sartre’s The Flies (1943) which is an existential re-interpretation of the myth of Orestes and Electra. Some of the recurrent themes in mythology that have been borrowed into literature are Fire-theft, Deluge, Land of the Dead, Virgin Birth, Resurrected Hero, Father-seekers, Father-slayers, Mother-murder, Eternal Return, Incest,
Catastrophe, Slaying of Monsters, Sibling Rivalry, Castration, Androgynous deities etc. Thus, myths serve the function of a cultural fitting when it is included in the field of literature.

Therefore, we understand that myths have become a part and parcel of human lives. Myths may die and get resurrected as the society changes, however, the need for myths does not die because man craves for order in this universe. There are elements of both explanation and interest in myths. The myths provide a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order and magical belief. The function of myth is to strengthen tradition with greater value and prestige by tracing it to a supernatural reality of events.

**MYTH CRITICISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Vincent B. Leitch in *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties* (1988) states that myth Criticism began its influence in the field of literary criticism during the 1930s and the influence lasted until the 1980s. Its heyday can be marked between the 1940s and 60s. The popular myth critics were Richard Chase (1904-1988), Francis Fergusson (1904-1986), Leslie Fiedler (1917-2003), Daniel Hoffman (1923-), Stanley Edgar Hyman (1919-1970), Constance Rourke (1885-1941), Philip Wheelwright (1901-1970), Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), William Troy (1903-1961), Maud Bodkin (1875-1967) and Northrop Frye (1912-1991). Though these critics were not in contact with each other, they had a certain way of thinking dependent on the theories of myth often derived from European anthropology, philosophy, sociology and folklore studies. Myth Criticism found its way through the rest of the critical theories owing to certain reasons: one, formalistic approaches no longer found
favour with the reading public due to their narrowness; two, early twentieth century anthropology and psychology seemed very impressive and attractive in its scope and depth; and three, modern life was felt to be in a disastrous spiritual state partly due to the influence of existential philosophy. (Leitch 115-116). Thus, myth criticism came up as a reaction against the concept of an absurd godless scientific world, yearning for spiritual significance. Myth criticism assumes that a literary work contains symbols, images, motives and characters that bring about the same emotions and responses in all people. Each of these mythological elements (archetypes) aids in the interpretation of the work. Myth Criticism can show the importance of an author’s imagery and explain why it is powerful. It can also be used in the study of mythopoeia (myth making). It is a form of inquiry about the complex relations between literature and myth. These inquiries are heterogeneous because they connect so many disciplines through interdisciplinary issues. Myth Criticism is also the locus for a series of complex questions, as suggested by Charles Eric Reeves:

Is myth embedded in literature, or are myth and literature somehow coextensive? Is myth (from Greek mythos, “tale, story”) inescapably narrative in form? Is all literature susceptible of myth criticism? How self-conscious are literary artists in the use or incorporation of myth? How does myth in, or as, literature evolve historically? Does a single governing myth, a “monomyth”, organize disparate mythic narratives and dominate literary form? What tasks, besides a simple cataloging of putative mythic components, fall to the myth critic? And most fundamentally, what does
"myth" mean in the context of literary criticism? (cited in Gill, "Archetypal Theory and Criticism")

The diverse answers to these questions lead to a survey of myth criticism.

Myth Criticism had its impetus mainly from Sir James Frazer and Carl G. Jung. Although myths take their specific shapes from the cultural environments in which they grow, similar motifs may occur in different mythologies. Certain images that recur in the myths of peoples widely separated in time and place tend to have a common meaning. They also elicit comparable psychological responses and serve similar cultural functions. Such motifs and images are called archetypes. "An archetype is an original pattern or prototype from which copies are made" (Smith, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory and Practice"). Thus, archetypal criticism focuses on recurrent patterns in literature and their parallels in folktale, dream, ritual and myth. Lyle E. Smith suggests an instance:

"Little Red Riding Hood’s wandering in the woods and confronting a wolf" is a fairy tale, "Jonah’s taking a sea voyage and being swallowed by a whale" is the Biblical myth, "Orpheus’ descending to the underworld to try to rescue Eurydice" is a Greek myth, and "the Ancient Mariner’s killing an albatross and having a perilous sea journey" is found in literature. (Smith)

All these are variations of a rebirth archetype in which the hero experiences a symbolic death and then is reborn, having gained special knowledge that can be brought back to the ordinary world. The main premise of archetypal criticism is that an understanding of such archetypes will help illuminate an individual literary text by connecting it to more universal patterns that often transcend literature itself. An archetype can take several shapes—myth, dream, religion, folktale, fantasy etc. Thus, myths are just
a part of an archetype. Myth critics believe that all literary works embody archetypes. Northrop Frye, one of the pioneers of myth criticism, considers archetypes as the “socially-concerned reorganizing forms and patterns of literature that originate in myth and which unify and reveal literature as an imaginatively inhabitable world” (Gill, “Northrop Frye”). According to myth critics, an understanding of why archetypal patterns reoccur will help the critic as well as the reader to connect the individual text to universal patterns in literature and everyday life. Several myth critics believe that myths can be subjected to different analyses. Myths use depth language, which conveys many meanings and has profound significance. Though the standard reason offered for the creation of myths is that early human societies needed to explain the events of the physical world, and lacking any explanation for such phenomena as storms and earthquakes, they created supernatural beings endowed with immense powers; a few critics also believe that the stories of gods are echoes of a vastly superior extra-terrestrial culture that visited earth in the distant past. As the awareness of the world grew more sophisticated, myths also became more sophisticated. Some myths focused on individuals, while the rest dealt with stereotypes. Since they are collective and in a sense, communal, they bring a sense of wholeness and togetherness to social life. In fact, the mythology of the classical world provided the themes for some of the world’s greatest drama, and similar themes can be traced in Renaissance literature through to Modern poetry. While myth criticism, in general, continues to draw freely on the psychology of Jung, social anthropology, the study of religions, metaphors and depth psychology, the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye attempted to redefine what criticism is, and what it can be expected to do (Gill).
BASIC PRINCIPLES FOLLOWED BY MYTH CRITICS

John B. Vickery in his Introduction to *Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice* (1966) enumerates certain basic principles followed by myth critics: one, "that the creation of myths is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need"; two, that "myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically"; three, that "myth provides a stimulus for the creative artist and it also provides concepts and patterns which the critic can use to interpret specific works of literature"; and finally, that "myth's endeavor is to create a meaningful place for man in this world" (Vickery 1966, ix). Basically, all myth critics, through their different approaches, reintegrate the 'Many' into the 'One'; that is, they try to establish the universality of myth. For instance, the American mythologist Joseph Campbell speaks of a 'monomyth' and he tries to locate the 'One' archetype from the 'Many' archetypes.

Though the myth critics followed certain fundamental assumptions, they adopted different approaches in practice. They relied on anthropologists and mythologists like Sir James Frazer and philosophers like Ernst Cassirer for their knowledge and understanding of myth. For instance, Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is an all-inclusive account of myths and rituals. He traced the origin of myths in rituals and rituals in magic; and suggested through these that human beings connected themselves with spiritual forces. As these forces took over the social practices, they started losing their original meaning. However, each myth critic adopted his own unique idea in the interpretation of a literary work. While Stanley Edgar Hyman adopted a ritualistic
approach to myth (for example, in his essay “The Ritual View of the Myth and the Mythic”, he endorses M. A. Murray’s 1914 essay “Hamlet and Orestes” as “a brilliant comparative study in the common ritual origins of Shakespeare and Greek Drama”) (Hyman 2007, 54), Richard Chase was in favour of a narrative approach (in his essay “Myth as Literature”, he suggests that Yeats’ poem “Among School Children” uses the myth of Leda and the Swan and points out that it is an example of a poem becoming mythical within itself out of its own structural and emotive necessity, and here Leda is just not a Greek maiden but several images sorted through the soul of Yeats) (Chase 184-5), Cassirer chose a cognitive approach (in The Myth of the State, he applies his logic of myth in primitive mentality to the problem of the nature of modern political myths. He borrows from the philosophy of Kant and regards myth as having its own logic, which enables him to both distinguish from and relate to human culture as a whole) (Cassirer 279-280), Philip Wheelwright chose a combination of ritual, narration and cognition, and Jung adopted a psychological approach. Jung also gave spiritual interpretations of mythic creations along with cognitive, narrative and cathartic functions of myth (Leitch 117-118).

Vincent B. Leitch further suggests that myth critics also sought to discover the formal, psychological, thematic, historic and cultural link that myth shares with literature: formal, in the sense of features of plot, character, theme and image; psychological, in the sense of human beings’ original modes of responding to reality; thematic, in the sense of the genesis of the world and people, the foundations of society and law and the nature of the Gods and demons; historical, that is, as a source, influence
or model for literature; cultural, that is, narratives imparting knowledge and wisdom that reinforce social and spiritual beliefs (Leitch 120).

According to the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), the first science that should be learned should be mythology or the interpretation of fables. He believed that myth had its sources in history, and that the best method to ancient divine wisdom and knowledge was to interpret the myths of a culture. He termed this interpretation "genealogical" interpretation. He examined the history of ancient customs, deeds and ideas through interpretation of fables to derive the principles of human nature and history. In fact, this genealogical interpretation is synonymous with historical interpretation. However, modern myth criticism frequently dealt ahistorically with hidden significance, with ancient types and with moral and spiritual meanings, as the discourse of myth was often secretive and paradoxical. This method of interpretation is not genealogical or historical, but allegorical. In allegorical interpretation, the search for a meaning is beyond the literal and moves into the spiritual limits of significance of the texts. This interpretation could be done in two ways, one, interpreting myths as allegories of natural phenomena and two, moral allegory, that is, interpreting myths to inculcate social and moral principles. In nature allegory, mythical beings are considered personifications of natural events. For instance, "the myth of Demeter and Persephone depicts the regular recurrence of winter and summer. The crashing of thunderbolts seems the bravado display of some colossal being, Zeus the thunderer" (Day 37). From the Indian point of view, we have Indra, "the king of heaven [...] who inhabited the sky, the firmament between earth and the sun, who rode upon the clouds, who poured forth the rain, hurled the forked lightning upon earth, and spoke in the awful thunder" (Garrett
230-231). The moral allegory theory is didactic, in the sense that it provides guidelines to lead a morally disciplined life. For instance, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are often treated as moral allegories. Similarly, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are treated as moral allegories. These texts are often interpreted and re-interpreted to provide lessons in morality.

Another aspect of myth criticism talked about frequently is its ever-present focus on destruction. Logos was placed against mythos. Myth critics took special pride in demythifying texts. One major aim of myth criticism was to question the truthfulness and meaning of myth. Myth criticism also risked the transformation of living archetypes into stereotypes. However, Maud Bodkin was of the opinion that mythical interpretation could be subtle, pliant and yielding itself to serve and follow the living imaginative activity.

The sociological mode of myth criticism was especially popular in America during the post World War II period. Several critical texts made significant additions to knowledge by unearthing what could be called distinctively American archetypes. For instance, Constance Rourke's *American Humor* (1931), Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), R.W.B Lewis' *The American Adam* (1955), Richard Chase's *The American Novel and its Tradition* (1957), Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) and Daniel Hoffman's *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (1961) produced detailed studies of archetypal American characters, themes, plots, images, genres and settings (Leitch 131). Here, myth criticism is being employed for purposes of literary nationalism. These essays also reveal the fact that the American soil is a fertile ground of folktale, myth and archetype. Daniel Hoffman, for instance, was of the opinion that
“American romance was a nonrealistic, poetic prose genre typically featuring a journey of self-discovery—a quest for (national) identity—cut off from the traditions of the Old World and seeking fresh myths for a new land” (quoted in Leitch 132). Though the old world traditions were discarded, they still formed the background for the American romance. Nevertheless, the depiction of the American hero by Hoffman was very different from the hero developed by Joseph Campbell. Hoffman’s mythical hero has no past, patrimony, siblings, family or even a life cycle. That is, the American hero was thoroughly different from the European hero as described by the leading myth critics. This American hero was the creation of an independent, indigenous folk whose cultural vision and social life were peculiar to itself.

Joseph Campbell, however, adopted the religious approach to myth criticism. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), he attempted to disclose the timeless human patterns in myth and literature (Leitch 133). This religious approach was more in favour of allegory than genealogy. Its point of view was deeply religious and unitarian, similar to the Eastern religions. However, it is quite close to the work of Jung, Bodkin and Wheelwright and a polar opposite to the sociological approach of Hoffman, Richard Chase and Leslie Fiedler (Leitch 133). Several times, Campbell almost explicitly endorses Jung’s interpretation of myth. For instance, having noted his own interpretation of myths as archetypes or universal patterns, he says, “The psychologist who has best dealt with these, best described and best interpreted them, is Carl Jung[...]” (quoted in Dundes 262). For Campbell, mythic forms were everywhere the same beneath regional variations. All heroes were one hero and all myths were one myth. Thus, he enlarged upon the aspect of ‘monomyth’—the term was borrowed from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s*
Wake. He devoted himself primarily to pure "Archetype" free from "Signature". According to him, modern society is in turmoil because modern man finds life meaningless. Modern man is bereft of myths because science has refuted myths. For him, the real meaning of myth is symbolic and the symbolic meaning of myth is psychological. He also believes that when accepted, myth gives meaning to life and can thus restore tranquillity to society. However, one criticism against Campbell's approach is that he constructs a composite hero pattern based on bits and pieces from many different myths and legends and that no one legend is analyzed in full.

A formalist approach to myth criticism was brought about by Francis Fergusson through *The Idea of a Theater* (1949), which studied the details of ten plays within the context of a general theory of drama informed by myth criticism. Fergusson was deeply influenced by British anthropology and in his explanations; he relied heavily on the notions of ritual and myth. For instance, he considered Oedipus 'a dismembered king and scapegoat' in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (Leitch 133). In fact, *Oedipus Rex*, for him, is a combination of a 'fundamental histrionic dimension', a 'primitive performative substratum' and an 'ancient ritual', which gave an awareness of the community (Leitch 134). Fergusson was deeply concerned with the specificities of individual works and the religious view of culture too. According to him, rationalism and philosophical idealism took over in the mid-seventeenth century, divorcing feeling and intuition from intellect and thought. Due to the triumph of the scientific mind, ritual, myth and organic community met with a disastrous end and myth was reduced to a lie. Thus, the task of criticism was to recover this lost traditional ritual sensibility, which was termed by several myth critics as 'mythic consciousness'. Myth critics began to deplore modern
man's bifurcated sensibility, his loss of religion and his love for science. Fergusson's formalist approach worked back reverently through concept and words to action and mystery lodged at the centre of communal life. The trajectory progressed from logos to mythos. Myth criticism also worked equally well as a critical instrument with poetry, drama or fiction and with any period of literature.

Carl Jung followed the psychological approach and he located the impersonal, universal source of superior literature in the collective psyche, which he depicted as a sphere of mythology. He characterized the primordial images from this mythological realm as archetypes. These archetypes were located and given symbolic meanings. For instance, water, an archetypal image, stands for the mystery of creation, birth-death-resurrection, purification and redemption, fertility and growth. He also considered water the most common symbol for the unconscious. Jung introduced analytic psychology after splitting from a close professional relationship with Sigmund Freud. However, he went beyond Freud's ideas of psychology and studied comparative mythology and anthropology. Sir James Frazer also influenced him. While Frazer thought that any similarities in myths between cultures were due to their influences upon one another, Jung thought that these similarities were due to something common in the unconscious mind of all humans. Thus, he developed the concept of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious are the ideas, themes and symbols found in the entire human race. These symbols, also called archetypes, create what Jung calls the 'Self'. The 'Self' can be viewed as an individual. The 'mask' is what the individual allows others to see. The 'shadow' is the evil side that the individual does not want others to see and actually rejects. The 'Anima' is the feminine side of the male individual and the 'Animus' is the
masculine side of the female individual. According to Jung, all these archetypes—shadow, Anima, Animus and Spirit—create the Syzygy, or the unified whole. People attempt to attain this unified whole. This search is called the Quest, which in turn, leads to the Night-Sea-Journey, a quest where a person is born, dies, and is reborn. This is exactly what is found in works of literature (Gill, “Archetypal Theory and Criticism”). Jung’s key ideas about literature are expressed in his early essay, “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry” (1922). Here, Jung distinguished between “an inferior mode of literature, characterized by the author’s successful assertion of his conscious intentions and aims against the unconscious demands of his work, and a superior mode characterized by the poet’s subordination to the requirements of his art object” (quoted in Leitch 120-121). According to Jung, the creative impulse becomes strong with the latter and this impulse is a reflection of the collective unconscious. He also believed in the affective power of literature, which emerged from the activation of mythological materials and swept away the individual consciousness, will, and intention of both the readers and the authors. Thus, Jung’s theory had its foundations in ancient mythology and the collective unconscious. He also emphasized the didactic value and the autonomy of literature. According to him, the cultural education given by literature compensated the inadequacies of the present, serving broadly to balance and improve the spirit of man. For Jung, any work of literature possessed a fundamental aesthetic independence. Within the realm of aesthetics, the literary object appeared an impersonal, autonomous, organic form.

Thus, Jung took Freud’s probing of mythic origins several steps further. Jung suggested that man is born with an inherited disposition to behave and think in certain
ways. As man has evolved, he has accumulated several patterns of thinking. These patterns are handed down to each succeeding generation and thus man, through the ages, receives a larger and more complex store of memories. The myths of a society express in an elaborate and decorative form this storehouse of patterns and racial memories. Each human mind is given the power to think in mythic terms. A few share certain primordial shapes or images of thought. Even if the dreams of normal people or the visions of neurotic people are not fully developed myths, they do have traceable mythic components. For Jung, mythic elements or symbols were of great importance because they allowed the mind to deal with that which was yet unknown or was only in the process of formation. In other words, the mind deals with the world through the intervention of the archetypes, and when the archetypes cannot be made to fit a view of the world, it results in chaos. Jung’s conclusion is a powerful case of myth as a producer of order out of chaos: “the mythology of a tribe is its living religion, whose loss is always and everywhere, even in the case of civilized man, a normal catastrophe” (quoted in Ausband 12-13).

Maud Bodkin was largely influenced by Jung’s theories. In Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (1934), she combined Jungian theories, especially those of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, with concepts from Freudian psychoanalysis and British anthropology. Specifically, she studied in detail, the rebirth archetype, the paradise-Hades archetype, the betrayed-betrayer woman archetype, and the archetypes of devil, hero and God. She offered several instances of myth criticism in literature, which include the scrutiny of Coleridge’s “The Ancient Mariner” and T.S.Eliot’s The Waste Land. Bodkin, however, resisted the Jungian temptation to universalize and she credited the
impact of historical conditions on the formations of particular versions of archetypes. According to her, "the images studied of man, woman, God, devil, in any particular instance of their occurrence in poetry can be considered either as related to the sensibility of a certain poet, and a certain age and country, or as a mode of expressing something potentially realizable in human experience of any time or place" (quoted in Leitch 122). Her theory of literature also emphasized the roles of personal unconscious and social history in literature. She, in fact, wanted to develop a reception criticism based on an affective conception of art because she believed that poetry communicated a communal knowledge of archetypal characters, plots and themes in an intensely emotional manner. She distinguished between the scientific and poetic uses of language and thus the literal truth of reference found in the discourse of science from the suggestive visionary truth of reference produced in the discourse of poetry. The key to Bodkin’s mimetic poetics was ritual dance, which operated as a model of complete communication in the arts. For Bodkin, mimesis involved "an alluring embodiment of numinous reality rather than an accurate mirror-like reflection of it" (quoted in Leitch 123). Thus, even though Bodkin’s conception of literature generously allowed for textual, didactic, expressive and affective dimensions of imaginative works, the criticism against Bodkin’s approach is that she assigned a vague place to the mimetic powers of poetry. Similar to Bodkin, Leslie Fiedler relied heavily on Jungian psychoanalysis in developing his unique system of mythopoetics. He, too, found it necessary to reserve a place for the personal unconscious while maintaining the role of the collective unconscious. As a Marxist, Fiedler was especially concerned to provide for sociological and historical factors shaping writers and their works during any given period. In his "Archetype and Signature" (1952),
Fiedler deliberately chose the terms ‘archetype’ and ‘signature’ rather than ‘myth’ to explain his poetics. His ideas on these terms have been summarized by Vincent Leitch:

"Archetype" for him [Fiedler] designated "any of the immemorial patterns of response to the human situation in its most permanent aspects." The Archetype belonged to the realm of the metapersonal, the unconscious, the id, and the community at preconscious levels. "Signature" meant "the sum total of individuating factors in a work;" it belonged to the domain of the ego and superego—the personality and the social collectivity—at conscious levels. Literature, properly speaking can be said to come into existence at the moment a Signature is imposed upon the Archetype.

(Leitch 124)

According to Fiedler, myth and folktale are pure archetypes and unlike them, literature exhibited individuating traits of not only genre, diction, metre and imagery, but also of social rules and historical conventions, which changed from place to place, time to time, and author to author. Fiedler’s formulation provided a role for biography, history and aesthetics, as well as ritual, folktale and myth. In other words, he fashioned a way of uniting literature and non-literature without sacrificing literature’s power of transporting the readers to the realm of the marvellous. With his special interest in the ordinary reader and his concept of Signature, Fiedler studied the popular literature of America. He redefined the Jungian archetype as a socially determined formation and a combination of Signature-Archetype. He also investigated the latest homegrown myths instead of the primitive folk works. In most of his finest criticism, he uncovered the American archetypes. As far as Fiedler was concerned, whatever a society repressed returned in its
literature. This dialectical concept of repression-compensation could be found in Jung's archetypal criticism, which was used by Fiedler in his conception of art. For Fiedler, this cultural mechanism was a moral force and a cause for hope.

Philip Wheelwright in *The Burning Fountain* (1954) waged an assault on simple concepts of representation and realism. He introduced a new language exclusively for myth criticism, which has nothing to do with logical positivism. He criticized the literal, logical discourse of science and termed it as steno language. He differentiated steno language from the discourse of myth in these terms: "Steno language was dogmatically limited to the public domain of law and necessity, of technical and conventional 'truth', and of denotation and monosignation [...] Unlike steno-language, the translogical, expressive discourses of myth, religion, and poetry opened a private realm of possibility and freedom, of deep and integral truth, and of connotation and plurisignation" (quoted in Leitch 125). For instance, in his criticism of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, he says that *King Lear* is great because through poetic devices like language, imagery, character and plot, a depth meaning is revealed which in turn reveals the truths and quasi-truths of high importance about human nature, old age, false reasoning and self-confrontation through suffering. Thus, Wheelwright defended the suggestive, paradoxical discourse of myth against the declarative, univocal language of logic and science. He associated mimesis and realism with rigid scientific literalism; and like other myth critics, he opposed the possible to the real, the paradoxical to the known, and the mysterious to the actual. In a secular age of science, he sought to keep alive the spiritual sense of a beyond. He was deeply offended by dogmas of plain sense and declarations against religious consciousness and thus deplored positivism, materialism and naturalism. Like Bodkin, he
wanted to move modern aesthetics towards mysticism. Wheelwright's interpretations are a direct reflection of all these feelings and aims. He also tried to link the narrative and the cognitive dimensions of myth in the field of poetics. For him, poetry, like myth, was a narrative mode of apprehending reality. According to him, myth and poetry shared with ritual "a drive for communal participation in the something beyond" (Leitch 126). The most distinctive factor about Wheelwright's theorizing on myth and literature is his strong view of affective poetics. According to him, a response to literature depended on apprehending its deep truths and wisdom in a spirit of awe and wonder.

Northrop Frye's criticism, however, emphasizes the thematic, narrative and archetypal similarities among literary works rather than the explication of single texts. He attempted a general theory of literature, which he approached from four perspectives in his four essays in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957). In the first essay, he depicted a historical pattern of five literary modes found in classical and post-classical literature. These five literary modes are myth, romance, high mimetic, low mimetic and irony. In each of the five modes, literary works could be sophisticated or naive and tragic or comic. Thus, numerous possible combinations evolved: sophisticated comic romance, naïve low mimetic tragedy etc. Sometimes, one mode might be dominant in a work and the other recessive in the same work of art. Thus, a pattern of oppositions structured Frye's system. He also believed that a dissociation of sensibility occurred in Western culture, creating two domains—mythological universe and the scientific universe. In the second essay, he put forward a theory of symbols, recognizing five levels that ranged from the ordinary to the anagogic. Leitch gives a description of this:
In its "descriptive" phase, literary language was referential; in its "literal" phase, it was nonreferential; in its "formal" phase, it offered autonomous, exemplary images; in its "mythical" phase, it communicated archetypes; and in its "anagogic" phase, it presented symbols of the whole of existence unconstrained by references, examples, or the known.

(Leitch 138)

This suggests the formalistic approach of Frye towards interpretation.

The theory of myths that forms the third essay has possibly been Frye's most influential contribution. This essay explained what was involved in the work of archetypal or myth criticism. He starts by identifying the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn and winter—with the four main plots or 'mythoi' of romance, comedy, tragedy and irony. These are further broken down into phases, each having six cyclical phases; thus twenty-four forms. The four mythoi constituted aspects of a central unifying quest-myth. In other words, all literary genres derived from the quest myth. In this essay, Frye also distinguishes between signs and motifs. While signs point outward to things beyond them, motifs are understood inwardly as parts of a verbal structure. For Frye, in literature, the sign-values are subordinate to the interconnectedness of motifs. The final essay proposes a theory of genres, where Frye outlined the differences between the lyric, epic and dramatic work. It also examined the literary conventions of diction, rhythm and visual presentation in epic, fiction, drama and lyric. Frye's focus was mainly on western literature and its classification. His detailed work on literary structure and symbolism established Frye as one of the most eminent scholars in Canadian history and led to the publishing of more books on myth and archetypal theory. Frye suggested that literary
criticism was a science as well as an art. He was also of the opinion that Aristotle, although he never used the term archetype, was the first archetypal critic because of the way he discussed the archetypes of tragedy in a methodical and open-minded manner. He was not much in favour of Jung’s theory of collective unconscious. He viewed this theory as an unnecessary hypothesis in literary criticism.

Frye considered the Bible to be the primary source for undisplaced myth in the post-classical western tradition. He considered it the central encyclopaedic work in the mythical mode. He noted that several images, symbols, character types, plots, tropes and genres are derived from the Bible. He suggested that the Bible is a single archetypal structure extending from creation to apocalypse. Thus, Frye’s conviction was that the total mythopoetic structure of concern extends beyond literature and moves into the realm of religion, philosophy, political theory and history. He suggested that myth could powerfully organize our thinking about literature and culture. He also showed through his analyses that myth criticism might ultimately connect with a larger theory of culture. The modern critic, according to Frye, “is a student of mythology, and his total subject embraces not merely literature, but the areas of concern which the mythical language of construction and belief enters and informs. These areas constitute the mythological subjects, and they include large parts of religion, philosophy, political theory, and the social sciences” (Frye 1971, 98).

Litch further notes that among the obvious reasons for the quick acceptance of myth criticism was its flexibility. It worked as a critical instrument on any genre from any period and place. In addition, it apparently posed no singular or radical threat to the established canon of great works. In several fields, it had the immediate effect of
enriching understanding of already acknowledged masterpieces. Myth criticism was easily adapted to the existing dominant patterns of inquiry. It could function as a flexible formalist methodology. Myth criticism could tolerate almost any politics, religion and critical approach. Its practitioners had a sense of community, optimism, work to be done and transcendence. Neither science nor technology could match myth criticism in its range and comprehensiveness, in its power to adopt multiple perspectives and in its ability to explain all human artifacts and imagination. Thus, the application of myth criticism takes us far beyond the historical and aesthetic realms of literary study back to the beginning of man's oldest rituals and beliefs (Leitch 144-147).

CRITIQUES OF MYTH CRITICISM

The formalists and the Marxists launched two main critiques against myth criticism. The Formalists charged that myth critics ignored the stylistic texture of literary texts and only borrowed the terminology from social sciences. The Marxists, on the other hand, believed that myth criticism avoided the realities of social history and put forth unreal socio-political attitudes (Leitch 145). A few other critics pointed out that myth criticism included within its range overt and covert politics. They also maintained that myth criticism avoided scrupulous close reading; and that it always sought ecstatic moments of transcendence. Another criticism against the myth critics is that they tend to forget that literature is more than a vehicle for archetypes and ritual patterns. In other words, they run the risk of being distracted from the aesthetic experience of the work itself. They forget that literature is art. Thus, their criticism becomes more of a narrow-minded approach to the works of literature. It is also characteristic of myth criticism to
turn the attention away from the local specificities of a particular book towards some myth, which is held to be older and grander and therefore better than the book one is actually talking about. A mere novel suddenly becomes literature as its author is shown to transcend the realm of the obvious and move into an archetypal situation already familiar in mythology. This raises the question of value judgments in literary analysis. The critique against myth criticism is that it takes these things for granted. Another critique against American myth criticism was that the practice was limited exclusively to the corridors of intellectually bankrupt American imperialist universities; and that myth criticism was “the organ of bourgeois reactionaries” (Ruthven 83).

**MYTH CRITICISM AND OTHER SCHOOLS OF CRITICISM**

Myth criticism is different from the earlier schools of criticism like the Marxist school or the Psychological school and other approaches to literature like the philosophical-moral approach, the religious approach or the sociological approach in the fact that none of these schools of criticism or approaches related the text to the distant past of the culture or gave importance to natural and cultural transmission. The later schools of criticism like the Structuralist, Post-structuralist and Deconstructive schools analyzed literature on the explicit model of modern linguistic theory. Nevertheless, critics like Claude Levi-Strauss used Structuralism to cut across the traditional disciplinary areas of the humanities and social sciences by undertaking to provide an objective account of all social and cultural phenomena, in a range that includes mythical narratives too. However, myth is widely used in postcolonial studies. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty in the article “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who
speaks for ‘Indian’ Pass?" refers to the postcolonial India which “is deprived of the peasant’s dream of a mythical and just kingdom (a Ram-rajya)” (quoted in Mongia 227). Thus, the mythical narrative Ramayana is being used to explain a situation in postcolonial India. Leela Gandhi in her Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction cites Nietzschean principles:

The Western humanist thinks of the ‘origin’ as the place of plenitude, presence and truth. The Nietzschean archeologist, on the other hand, can only find the residual traces of malice, theft, greed and disparity at the start of human history. In other words, s/he discovers that a Fall prefigures and disfigures the purity of Genesis. Seen as such, the very idea of Genesis—of unadulterated origins—is shown as a supplement, or as a mythical compensation for an originary lack. (Gandhi 38)

Thus, myth plays a very important role in postcolonial studies as it emphasizes the fact that if all things are knowable in the same way, they must be virtually identical. A better reading of the text is rendered when myth criticism conjoins with postcolonial theory. This idea is examined in detail in the next chapter, which talks about postcolonial criticism and the way it can incorporate and be incorporated in myth criticism.