With the advent of modernism in the Indian English novel, its scope has widened considerably. As the eminent critic Makarand Paranjpe has noted:

More recent trends such as postmodernism in both fiction and literary theory stress the disconnection of the novel with objective, external reality and its rather solipsistic involution into the prison-house of language. In fact, structuralist and post-structuralist narratology has shown that the novel has been far closer to its roots in romance, legend and myth...... (Paranjpe 78)

Indian English novelists reared up in then ancient tradition, replete with myth, legend, romances and folklore have found these a most natural and convenient way of depicting the truth of life. In the context of this idea of the integration of the aspects of myths, legends etc to the Indian English novel, we have cause to refer again to the plurality of the Indian tradition. From the earliest times, the recurrent motifs in Indian life and culture have been those of both conflict and co-ordination.

Interdependent relationships between the national and the local, between the folk and the urbane, between Sanskrit and the vernacular or more recently between the regional languages and English have led to a complex multidimensional cultural reality. Different cultures and traditions thus become interrelated. Thus, we see that folk motifs and myths get absorbed into the high, sophisticated, urbane culture and both enrich each other. As Paranjpe notes

Thus folktales and motifs get absorbed into high culture, are refined from their local habitation and colour and become representative of abstract and universal ideas. (Paranjpe 89)
Folklore or folk literature of antiquarian origin is generally anonymous and free from author orientation and in this context becomes integrated with common life and later part of ordinary discourse. At certain points of history, particularly in India which has a very rich tradition of folklore and myth, they came to be used as instruments of social change. As an example, we can cite the examples of animal moral fables like the *Panchatantra* or the *Jataka Tales* and the numerous stories strewn throughout the great epics—the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

Myth and folklore therefore far from remaining merely discourse connected with antiquity and distant tradition is actually related to life and reality. This is elaborated by a noted critic—“Myth is largely dedicated to discovering the truth about men and societies whose deaths in a remote time have conferred on them an aura of mystery that is a subtle compound of secular curiosity and religious awe.” (Vickery 148). Myth has been explained in various ways, as a story, as a manner of expression—of our togetherness of feeling, of living and of action. A common dictionary definition of myth refers to a “primitive tale imaginatively describing or accounting for natural phenomena especially by personification.” (*Knowledge Library* 1851).

A study of the fascinating world of myth or mythology provides readers with an explanation of the patterns of ancient life against a background of the specific characters of their own society as well as of its roots in earlier primitive worlds. Myths preserve the meaning and purpose of social customs and institutions. The importance of the study of myth and folklore and their relevance in literature and life which is gaining ground in recent times is significant; since it shows an increased awareness of the importance of religion, ritual, magic and their sustaining power in life, as a kind of support system against the absolute loneliness and
emptiness of the modern world. The importance of mythology and folk legends find increasing importance in today's life. As Chou Yang, the Chinese politician-thinker of Marxist China, claimed "Mythology always encourages man to break away from his enslavement and seek after the life of the real man." (Meserve 130). As an example we can see how Sir James Frazer's monumental work The Golden Bough aroused the interest in myths and legends and depicted their relevance to contemporary life. Great writers like Yeats, Conrad and Eliot were encouraged to aspire to a timeless realm beyond the historical process by Frazer's illuminating and pioneering work.

Myth or mythology has emerged in various parts of the world but there are often parallels between different cultures. This is through these myths having a common origin, such as the Indian and Greek both of which stemmed from an ancient Indo-European culture. Although different versions of these myths developed, marked similarities remain. Like myth, folklore evolved among most ancient communities. Elements of folklore include legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles etc. Lore about nature, customary activities at birth, marriages and deaths and traditional forms of dances, songs and dramas performed at community gatherings have been and will ever be a part of every society right from ancient times. Elements of folktale have at all times entered into sophisticated written literature.

A study of folklore in relation to modern urban culture suggested an interesting set of contrasts between the folk versus elite, rural versus urban, word of mouth versus mass communication, superstitious versus rational etc. This set of contrasts was intriguing and was likely to provide a basis for study of modern literature. The contrasts and similarities between myth-folklore and urban
conceptions led to the opening of challenging avenues of thought in tackling texts as well as in the creation of them. The conscious and unconscious uses of myths are recognised literary devices and part of modern trends in literature. The conscious use of myth in the modern context to express the predicament of the modern individual is to view the person and situation in a “larger perspective of time” (Mukherjee 132). This enriches the literary experience of the reader through the element of recognition. The unconsciousness use of myth is where writers use mythical situations unconsciously. This happens when without being aware they are doing so. This happens when these writers are so steeped in their mythical traditions that these operate in them unconsciously and such elements emerge in their creative works.

In case of the Indian English writers, myth and folklore appear in their works both consciously and unconsciously. Myth and folklore has been a part of the rich treasure house of Indian culture and society from time immemorial. The traditional Indian value system is influenced by myths, legends and folk traditions. Social and political action in India, in turn, is affected by the traditional value system. However, change and modernity is now inevitable in India and there is a tension created by the impact of modernity on tradition. But growth arises from conflict and we see that whatever is valuable in tradition will survive and what has ceased to be viable in a modern context will then be abandoned. The Indian instinct is for borrowing and at the same time conserving, for clinging on to the old and never rejecting what is outmoded. This gives rise to an attitude which is conservative. This piling up of traits was once compared by Nehru to a palimpsest, an ancient manuscript written upon over and over again without the preceding layer
being completely obliterated. (Lannoy XVI). Little wonder then that myths and legends play so important a part in Indian life as well as in literature, art and culture.

Western myths refashioned by poetic masterminds are largely individual creations and in this respect resemble our modern attempts to deal with traditional forms as in the works of Shelly and Swinburne. There is always an attempt to stamp mythological stories and ideas with new meanings based on individual experience. In the myths of India, we are brought the intuitive, collective wisdom of an ageless, anonymous and many-sided civilization. A study of Indian mythology would show us that life in its totality, the mental, spiritual and physical is expressed through the icons of mythology. Apart from humans and superhumans, animals, birds, the elements and rivers have a place of importance both symbolically and literarily.

In the world of mythology, girls and young women are regarded as human embodiments of the maternal energy of nature. They are regarded as vessels of fertility. According to an ageless belief, nature requires to be stimulated by humans; for example, in India, there is a particular tree (Asoka) which is supposed to put forth blossoms only when touched or kicked by a young woman. In Hindu art and mythology, the gods and goddesses are the self-revelation of the Absolute, the male being the personification of the passive aspect which we know as Eternity, the female of the activating energy—Shakti. Though apparently opposites, they are in essence one. Their identity is stated here in symbol, God dwells in the root figure in the Lingam and the goddess in the Yoni- womb. She is called the Universal Power—the fairest of the three worlds—Tripura Sundari. She has been known in myth as Uma, Durga, Parvati, Kali, Chamundi etc. She has her living counterpart in every woman as the God in every man. The significance of the feminine power Shakti, in her all powerful, benevolent and malevolent incarnation is a significant
aspect of Indian mythology, having relevance to life in its entirety. Sometimes the
goddess appears in the form of a black demoness in man—destroying wrath. This is a
materialization of the exterminating aspect of the mother of the world. A warrior
maid who came into being out of the combined wrath of all the Gods in council. She
was created to vanquish the demon tyrant Mahisasur. The host of Gods made the
cosmically significant gestures of abdicating their various masculine attitudes, royal,
valiant and heroic, in order that the demon may be destroyed into the primal female
thus, all the particularized forces of their various personalities were powerfully
integrated. It might be said that the Goddess represents clearly by her feminine
nature, the life bearing, life nourishing maternal principle. This is her positive aspect
but the negative aspect is expressed in her incarnation as Kali, the Black One. Kali,

is the feminine form of the word Kala meaning time. In the Goddess then the
totality, rather than a single aspect of her essence form forms the subject of her
representation.

Another aspect of femininity of the Goddess is Lakshmi, the consort of
God Vishnu. Lakshmi (Padma) is ageless. She is known by names like Padmakshi
(Lotus eyed). She bestows long life, prosperity, offspring and fame. In Indian
Buddhist tradition, she is shown with a lotus in hand (Padmapani) and this pose is
taken up by the Universal Saviour Padmapani the greatest among the Bodhisattvas
or immortal helpers of Buddha. In Buddhist tradition she becomes Prajana
(wisdom) and Paramita (virtue) thus in Goddess Lakshmi the symbol of the ageless
Mother Earth is integrated with the Buddhist concept of the female aspect of
Universal Buddha—Prajana Paramita— the source of enlightening knowledge.

Taking into account these representations of the female in myth,
religion and folklore the Indian attitude to womanhood is various, by turns, she is
looked upon with desire, idealization and alarm. The Indian woman is both raised to the level of a Goddess and she herself is expected to revere her husband as a God. The woman is both a Sita, the Hindu ideal of the selfless wife and the terrible Kali, malevolent Goddess who arouses awe and fear.

The mythical tradition of India particularly those associated with the cult of the Goddess have a direct bearing on the status of women and the making of social institutions in India. Institutions like marriage, family- joint and nuclear, castes and class have been playing an important role in Indian life and literatures from the very ancient times. Social institutions as the shapers of attitudes in Indian life and the place of myth and folklore therein have been an issue of perennial interest. In an Indian family while the father is supreme authority, the mother is the centre of domestic and emotional life. The effect of deep- seated, maternal attachment on Indian culture is profound. In India the commonest sublimation is the intense mother- Goddess worship of womanhood in the abstract.

Indian societies seem to foster and develop in woman a resilience even under a restricted circumscribed life. Indian women in spite of adverse effects of the *Purdah* and the patriarchal systems have today attained a position of strength. In this century Indian women have undergone a social revolution more far reaching than man. This quiet revolution of the fair sex is an important element of social change in modern India. One of the mythic symbols connected with change is the wheel or *chakra*, myths and rituals associated with the concept of continuous change are associated with the same. The moving *chakra* with its perfect shape with the focal point of the universe situated at its centre in mysterious stillness. A classical metaphor for defining *Maya* is the wheel of fire—a continuous circle of fire, made by a whirling torch representing the movement of time and events. The weapon of
Vishnu is a whirling fire-wheel. Shiva in his destructive aspect is ringed with a fire wheel and the solar wheel figures prominently in Vedic, Brahmana and Vaishnava symbolism. Lynn White an expert on medieval technology is of the opinion that in India “the idea of perpetual motion was entirely, consistent with and was perhaps rooted in the Hindu concept of Cyclical and self perpetuating nature of all things.” (White 290). The impact of urbanization and westernization has resulted in great changes in individual and social life. Changes in familial and social structure are particularly noticeable.

A unique aspect of Indian mythology is the plurality and the multi-dimensional qualities mirroring the diversity of life and the world. Therefore among the divinities of the Hindu pantheon only those who exhibit a multitude of attitudes and activities and possess an enigmatic character are considered to represent the almighty. Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti (Mother Goddess) are considered the true representation of the infinite reality for they reflect both the creative and the destructive, the terrible and the benign. In other words the totality of life itself. The other deities have only specialized functions and cannot be embodiments of the Absolute.

Like myth, folklore also has its beginnings in the remote past of human origin. Folk culture always had a mysterious background deep in time when early man perceive the world animistically and performed pagan rites. Among rural folk these old ways and customs once vital in their lives lingered on as outmoded survival in the face of onslaughts of modernity. The study of folklore has in the past been associated with primitive country folk. However folklore studies today is contemporary to the here and now, and to the issues and philosophies of the day. It refers also to the large masses of rural folks who have moved to the towns as well as
to the generations that are born within the city. For their lives may be shaped by
traditional codes of behaviour, dress and cuisine, expression, world view etc.
However we have to redefine the concepts of folklore to change its association only
with antiquity. If folklore is associated with tradition it is no longer only ancient
tradition. It is tradition in the context of a dynamic living force. Tradition is always
being created anew, and there are many traditions of modern origin which are as
relevant as ancient ones.

The study of folklore therefore has been far from being an antiquarian
hobby, and throughout the history of its study been connected with national issues
and concerns. In the nationalists' quest for a national language literature and history,
mythology and folklore often overlapped. In this folklore proved of special use for it
could be embedded in regional dialect, suggest literary themes and contain
remembrances of the mythological and historical past. Folklore though originating
in the past has an unbroken continuity in the sense of adapting to the current and in
its unique way the repository of tradition and change. The process of transformation
of traditional folklore is emerging as an explicit fact and presented at different levels
of transformation. To many people, tradition seemed to offer a stability and strength,
so folklore and its values were ushered in. It is seen that revitalization of tradition
results sometimes in romantic glorification and sometimes in vulgarized,
commercialized forms.

The ancient Indian civilization harks back to myth and legends. India was
noted for its great story tellers who were repositories of wisdom of their great
civilization. As Dr. Iyengar puts it:
Who can resist even in these days of sophistication, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* or *The Iliad*? The banishment of Rama on the very day of his coronation, the outrage of Draupadi in the Kuru Court, the vengeful Bhima slaking his thirst in the blood of Dushasana, the killing of the sleeping warriors by Aswathama—these are among the archetypes of human agony and superhuman endurance that take us back to the dawn of civilization, the ultimate springs of the Jungian "Collective Unconscious". (290)

The connection of myth with literature is varied and its use to depict contemporary reality is an universal tendency. Myth is used both consciously and unconsciously, as a literary device. In modern literature the conscious use of myth is well known through the writings of Eliot, Joyce or O'Neill. These writers used mythical situations in modern contexts. In Indian English literature, many writers have found the use of myth and folkloristic device as a convincing way of depicting the truth of life. For Indians reared up in the diet of *The Ramayana, The Mahabharata* the numerous stories of the *Puranas* myth comes naturally to them in their expressions. In Indian English writers we note the conscious use of myth as well as the unconscious. The Indian English writers who benefited from the technical knowledge and experiments of the west, however had to be originally creative when it came to creating patterns with his own mythology.

In Indian English literature one may notice situations and characters adhering to a recognized cultural context which assume a certain permanence in the Indian mind. This is particularly seen in the context of women characters with "One prominent archetype of the patient submissive ideal of womanhood as exemplified by Sita that has occurred many times not only in Indian English fiction but in the
novels in every Indian language.” (Mukherjee 164) This observation by the critic, Meenakshi Mukherjee is an expression of the truth that the ideal is so much a part of the Indian mind where women adhere to certain archetypal values that we find a galaxy of Sitas, Savithris and Shakuntalas as symbols of suffering and tolerance. Relatively one can talk of The Ramayana which provides Indian writers with archetypes of the ideal king, ideal brother, ideal subjects even an ideal villain. The other epic Mahabharata provides no ideals, it is a faithful picture of a flawed society where every character is human in their weaknesses, jealousy and intrigue. According to Irawati Karve, The Ramayana is in the tradition of the Sanskrit Kavya tradition which stresses on idealism. Idealism involve, war, even death. (166) Therefore as idealism has always been a part of Indian literary tradition The Ramayana legends are more in use in Indian and Indian English fiction. Therefore there was a total neglect of the Mahabharata as source material because this epic presents life in the harsh and unflinching light of reality.

The dominant myths which shape the Indian mind mould relationships and form the basis of traditions are based on other ancient texts like the Manusmriti or The Laws of Manu. This work is the foundation of attitude in India to women and social relationships. The ideal of Indian womanhood is Sita and Savitri as also Draupadi and Gandhari. These symbols of ideal woman hood were representations of the ancient codified laws. The ideals are however sometimes subverted to show a different reality, as we see ambiguous shades in their characterisation from time to time. In Indian English fiction of the recent past there is now a variety in the mythical representation of women and relationships. There are the passive sufferers of Savitri myth in R.K Narayan’s The Dark Room on one hand and the rebellious Daisy (Painter Of Signs) who defies tradition. Gita Mehta (Raj) and Anita Desai

74
(Voices In The City) deal with the theme of women’s imprisonment and trapped existence in the traditional set up. In the women’s attitudes and the writer’s methods we see how modern ideas percolate into, modify myths and traditional values of women characters, and portray her as a real, living human person removed from the mythical image. Shashi Deshpande, the eminent writer, particularly make use of myths, legends and traditional images to depict the dilemma of the modern woman in her novel The Long Silence where she makes mythical analogues to Sita, Savitri and Draupadi- “Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husbands’ travails…” (Deshpande 15). She prefers Maitreyee, sage Yajnavalkya’s wife who rejected her husband’s offer of half his property and wanted immortality. However even in Indian myth and legend women were shown in dual images passive but protesting for example- Sita’s refusal to undergo a second Agni-Pariksha and Draupadi’s vow of revenge.

Many writers sensitive to human dilemma and psychological upheavals against a backdrop of change takes apart the elements of myth and folklore and seeks to accommodate and adjust these to the new. The values embodied by the important mythical characters still loom large in the portrayal of women in most literary works. However the cherished Indian values like subordination, Dharma, sexual purity etc sanctified by tradition and imposed on woman are challenged and sought to be done away with under the impact of modern ideas.

Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai too have made ample use of myth and folkloristic design in the depiction of situation and character particularly with the image construction of women and their response to life. They have probed the recess of the sources of Indian myth and legend and have come up
with the multi-dimensional aspects of Indian response to life, depicted in these perennial sources of Indian tradition.

Myth and folklore, so much a part of Indian tradition impinge upon the consciousness of the Indian writers giving their work a certain richness. The great Indian epics, scriptures and mythology are to the Indian mind the foundation of their very philosophy and society and therefore remain valid for all time. The strength of the modern writers, both Indian and western can be gauged by their ability to render afresh the ancient myths and free themselves from the limitations of the same myths. Myth as has been said, “transcends time, uniting the past.... with the present.... and reaching toward the future....”(Guerin, Labor et al 160).

Sahgal, Markandaya and Desai with very literary devices make ample use of myth in their fiction. They draw upon the perennial sources of Indian myth, rituals and folklore to depict situations, decipher characters and illuminate relationships. The three sometimes substantiate mythical trends in their work, drawing parallels with stories and beliefs from traditional Indian lore. Rukmani, in *Nectar In A Sieve*, is the embodiment of *Shakti* in her role of the mother who uphold the very existence of family and is also the preserver of traditional values sustaining her society. A parallel between Rukmani’s character as a repository of endurance, sacrifice and strength and the mythic Mother India image creation of the nationalistic era can be made.

Sahgal both uses mythic parallels and at the same time subverts them in her illustration of character, situation and relationships. She subverts the myths of patriarchal power, idolization of traditional womanly virtues (*Sati* etc.), glorification of motherhood and pre-conceived notions about the east-west encounter in novels like *Rich Like Us* and *Possession.*
Desai's variety in the portrayal of relationships and in deciphering the complexity of the human psyche derives power from the use of myth. Her work draws strength from her existentialist beliefs and her tendency to create parallels with the higher levels of Hindu philosophy. Nanda Kaul's escape urge, renunciation and final exit has been given mythic annotations by critics like Bettina L. Knapp who call her "an earthly replica of certain Hindu deities is archetypal in stature: a complex of opposites, both mortal and immortal, individual and universal." (Knapp 177) This critic also talks about the climax of the novel as "a rite of Exit." (177) For these writers and others before and after them, myth helps in probing "the inner spirit which gives that form its vitality and its enduring appeal." (Guerin, Labor et al 167)
Works Cited


