CHAPTER 3

Use of Orality and Storytelling in the Novels of Salman Rushdie
and Amitav Ghosh

Orality and storytelling are the two most dominant features of Indian narrative culture and tradition. Starting with the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and Epics via the storytelling traditions like the *Panchatantra* and *Katha Sarit Sagar*, to the recent renderings in fiction writing, the ideas of orality and storytelling are being used to discuss the various aspects of Indian life and culture. In the Vedic times, orality and storytelling were synonymous with the transmission of the Vedas, because they were very close to the day-to-day human life, and were mostly participatory.\(^1\) This participatory discourse was further essentialised by the growing preference of both the oral story teller and the listener in a particular social context. In the literary contexts of CIWE, although new forms of expression are always being explored by the authors, orality and storytelling as the two important aspects of communication still appeal to them most. Particularly, in the context of post-modern IWE, the use of orality and storytelling has enabled authors to conduct experiments with various narrative strategies while writing novels.

Orality plays an important role in post-colonial literature, for the single important reason that many colonized countries had highly developed oral traditions in their society. However, as John Thieme suggests, it is a mistake to propose differences between the scribal and the oral, because the two frequently intersect (198). A country like India had a highly developed oral tradition, along with advanced literary traditions like the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* that exist in various written forms but are also transmitted through oral performances and storytelling. Subsequently, the revival of the interest in epics, mythology, folk literature and culture in CIWE has to be seen in connection with the idea of
how newer versions of the age-old cultural forms still appeal to the writers in a
different time period of the 21st century. This revival is also marked by the
emergence of a new readership whose interest in the oral storytelling tradition has
resulted in the recurrence of dialogic narratives in the literary history of
contemporary India. Moreover, the cause and effect theory, prevalent in the
stories in the epics, mythologies and legends, has helped in formulating the
trajectories of storytelling by the Indian authors of the 21st century. Walter
Benjamin states: “The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or
that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are
listening to (the) tale” (Benjamin, The Novel 364). Underlying such a statement is
the ever-present relationship between the teller and the listener when ideas of
storytelling are concerned.

Timothy Brenan proposes six characteristics of postmodern writing. Considered in terms of CIWE, Brenan’s formulations seem very relevant in the
analysis of the postmodern Indian English texts. For an Indian author, ancient
classics and legends form an indispensable backdrop in the present times. These
are not merely to be cited as different forms of representation because they
stimulate his thinking and outlook, and provide him with the resources of
language. One may very well notice that Indian mythologies, and the two epics
Ramayana and Mahabharata along with the Puranas and Upanishads, and the
stories from Panchatantra and Katha Sarit Sagar are exclusively used as pretexts
to suit various contexts and purpose of narration. Ludo Rocher opines that Indian
scripts were reintroduced after they disappeared with the Indus Valley
Civilisation. Although debated, it is however pertinent to state that traces of many
inscriptions all over the subcontinent can be dated back the 3rd century BC which
means that Indians would resort to oral transmission more than two thousand
years after they could be retrieved in the written form. In connection to this, one
can very well cite the examples of the Vedas and the Puranas.
The authors of CIWE resorting to writing novels to suit the form of oral storytelling is to be seen against a common view that seeks to connect writing to Imperialist activities. Although words are related to the oral speech, writing confines the words into a visual field forever. This is one important point following which techniques of oral storytelling still remain the most chosen mode of expression among the postcolonial Indian authors. In another sense, storytelling also implies freedom for an author because he can play with it. This idea can be grounded in the attempts made by many post-independence Indian English authors who feel that they need to set themselves free from Western narrative forms and assert their Indianness by resorting to a culture that indigenously developed in India.

The presence of an Indian character in a novel written by an Indian not only disrupts ‘Western’ aesthetic and epistemological norms but also dismantles ‘Western’ means of social and political control. It is mainly because the ‘Indian’ experience enables the Indian authors to observe the world from the perspective of an insider to the Indian culture. It serves a very significant purpose as it teaches him/her how certain stories give meaning and value to the places they emphatically tend to call ‘home’. This is what makes the CIWE authors write stories about India whose story-house may be traced in the oral storytelling traditions of ancient India. Still the question that strikes us is—why storytelling? Constant retelling in oral culture is so crucial because continuity of culture cannot rely on anything other than memory and internalization of traditions through imitation. This can be seen as a very apt remark on the feasibility of storytelling in the context of CIWE. This is mainly because; structuring the experience and patterning the narrative have enriched the field of IWE since its inception in India. Hence, it is interesting to study why contemporary Indian authors like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh often resort to the oral storytelling mode to discuss their experiences of the lives of the oppressed, and the “subaltern” who need to speak within the dominant discourses of the society.
In modern times, despite the changes in tastes and milieu and the modes of representation, epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the Puranic and mythological stories still continue to provide models of behaviour to many Indians even today. It is observable that IWE, in the last two decades of the 20th century, has provided an entirely new direction to the philosophical speculation on the significance of the two Hindu epics in question. Roman Maitra and Jean-Claude Carriene speak for the relevance of an epic like the *Mahabharata* in terms of its continued significance in the Indian psyche. Carriene draws attention to the following realization:

One of the facts that drew my attention, when I first came to India with Peter Brooks in the 1970s, was whenever we went around in India whomever we questioned about the Mahabharata, everybody had something to say. They not only knew about the story and the main characters, they also had a personal vision of the epic and some specific comment to make. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana and other mythical texts in India are widely open to personal interpretations. Anybody can identify with one of the characters, or sometimes to a specific line that talks particularly to him or her to such an extent that sometimes it becomes the center of a life. I don’t see any other example on earth of this strange continuity. (qtd. in Trikha xii)

So, extending this notion, one can also state that it is in the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that many Indian people seem to find and locate their Indianness.

For the first time perhaps, Raja Rao raised a pertinent question: “What can represent India today?” Implicit in his practice of writing fiction in English is yet another question: “How ‘Indianised’ English can be so effectively used in functionally and contextually determined styles?” The first successful effort to place an answer to such questions is undoubtedly Raja Rao’s pre-independence novel *Kanthapura* (1938) from whose narrative skills, his successors like Rushdie and Ghosh must have borrowed substantially. This also reminds one of Raja Rao’s pioneering stylistic experiment with the idea of ‘Sthalapurana’ in
Kanthapura following the tradition of writing ‘legendary history’. Promod Nayar has observed that during 1950s to 1960s, most postcolonial literatures of Africa and Asia are marked by themes of nationalism and decolonisation. Many Indian English authors had taken cultural assertion and cultural nationalism, as the immediate source of Indianness in their writings. Cultural assertion, as practiced by Raja Rao, is seen in terms of a return to cultural roots, rituals, icons and belief systems. In his fictional works, the native tradition of ‘Sthalapurana’, local histories, and modes of speech are mostly emphasized. While cultural nationalism is seen in terms of a treatment of cultural commonalities as a source of political solidarity, nation building, and anti-colonial resistance (13). This intellectual background poses various challenges in front of the Indian authors of most recent times who meaningfully try to deal with the ideas of India and Indianness in their fictional works.

The contribution of the first great trio of IWE to the use of orality and storytelling in fiction has to be considered in some detail. Raja Rao explains in his famous “Foreword” to Kanthapura, that there is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich legendary history of its own, in which some famous figure of myth or history has made an appearance. In this way, the storyteller, who commemorates the past, keeps a native audience in touch with its lore and thereby allows the past to mingle with the present, the gods and heroes. Rather than being a traditional novel with an orderly structure and compressed plot, Kanthapura follows the oral tradition of ‘Sthalapurana’, which is absorbed both into the narration and the language. As Vinita Bhatnagar writes:

In attempting to write a Sthalapurana in English Rao creates a hybrid literary product with allegiances to both Indian and Western literary traditions. And by simultaneously using devices of myth and realism, Rao succeeds in telescoping the cultural experience of five thousand years in the Indian subcontinent with its modern history. The hybrid nature of the text based upon the use of an indigenous form and an alien language qualifies it as truly ‘postcolonial’ in its status. (87)
Raja Rao's contemporary, Mulk Raj Anand also asserted that "the novels of Indian English writers are primarily part of Indian writing and not English literature, because they echo Indian consciousness, the distinctive awareness of the wholeness of men, which we have in our tradition from the forest books onwards, the sense of life at various levels against death" (Anand, Creating Theory 51). He also asserts that these writers often bridge the gap between the surviving narratives in different languages of India and the influences of the modern techniques in the West. They have also taken the novel form out of the narrow provincial boundaries of Indian languages into the longer tradition of the international epics. Similarly, in his Introduction to Gods, Demons and Others, R. K. Narayan stated:

The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all times. Every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance, and an underlining of the distinction between good and evil...Over an enormous expanse of time and space events fall into proper perspective. There is suffering because of the need of work off certain consequences, arising from one's actions, in a series of births determined by the law of Karma. (i)

So, it becomes clear that the first generation of Indian English novelists relied heavily on the Indian mythical tradition to borrow the ideas of cultural nationalism that they were compelled to assert while writing their novels in the English language.

According to B. B. Kachru, Raja Rao's main innovations were— expansion of the stylistic range, contextual acculturation, and the use of the Puranic structure. He pointed out that Rao provided a paradigm within which a bilingual writer's creativity must be understood and described. He further states:

In the gradual unfolding of Rao's vision of an Indian novel in English, he worked as it were with a chisel. He was refining his technique, experimenting linguistically, synthesizing the cultural and philosophical ingredients, and above all molding the
English language to give it an Indian identity. He was also Indianising the English language beyond the surface level. (Kachru 584)

When one reads the fictional works of Rushdie and Ghosh, the influence of Raja Rao seems quite dominant. Like Rao, Rushdie and Ghosh too have made the marginal become the formative constituent of reality in a postcolonial text. Like Rao, they too have hinted at the simultaneity of orality and storytelling to make the point clear that their interest lies in the story as well as in the act of narrating the story. Like Rao they too have engaged myth into the context of the tale to represent the idea of India with continuing links with India’s cultural past.

Any reader, who embarks on reading their novels for the first time, will at once understand that underlying their novels, there may be a source in the great epics or regional lore. So, a systematic reading of the novels of both Rushdie and Ghosh might also provide a scope to dig out all such sources by contextualizing the narrative in myths and epics. Because, their novels are so rich in allusions and references to myths that behind the surface could be found the layers of suggestiveness and meaning. Several times, Rushdie and Ghosh have returned to India’s cultural tradition to confirm and assert their fidelity to the cultures of India. Anita Desai in her article on contemporary Indian fiction has discussed this turn towards storytelling among the very recent Indian English writers quite poignantly. She draws attention to Rushdie’s comment that his *MC* was less influenced by magic realism than by the structure of the epic *Mahabharata*. She also adds:

> Immediately there was a flood of younger writers delighted to return to the old style of storytelling that was strangely the ‘latest’ and ‘newest’ style. In following his trajectory, they found themselves travelling so far Westward that, the world being the shape it is, they have arrived in the east again (qtd. in Kanganayakam 24).

So, following what Desai states, one needs to be clear that while using Western literary theories to discuss a text of IWE, one needs to avoid the attitudes that might lead to totalising.
But another fact is that Rushdie and Ghosh do not follow Raja Rao blindly. Rushdie seems to have disagreed with Raja Rao on many grounds. But he does agrees with him on the issue of structuring the Indian nation which is enormous, incoherent and seemingly formless. But both the authors have stressed the Puranic methods of narration which is taken to characterize India and the Indians. As Rao very aptly puts in his famous “Foreword” to Kanthapura “We (Indians) tell one interminable tale.” This tale has a flowing narrative, a lose character base, a beginning and an end. Similarly, Rushdie’s ‘chutnified’ narratives may have become the example of a new genre: a ‘metafiction’ of the third world literature where the mythic and historical, fabulous and rational, comic and ironic comingle too easily into an amazing pastiche of non-mimetic forms (Srivastava 196).

To talk about a visible influence of the Puranas in contemporary Indian novel in English, it is pertinent to discuss briefly how they have affected Indian life and culture. In the preface to the book Puranic Encyclopedia, Vettam Mani writes that Puranas, along with the great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have for centuries, profoundly influenced Indian life and culture. He also claims that while their genealogies and the dynastic account form the bed rock of the political history of ancient India, they throw a flood of lights on all aspects of Indian culture—its religion, social practice, art, literature and sciences. They help in understanding various aspects of Hinduism—its belief, modes of worship, its mythology. As a matter of fact, Vettam Mani proclaims that “It is virtually impossible to understand not only ancient Indian life and culture, but also the literature in modern India languages as it largely draws upon the ideas and ideologies as embodied in the context of the Puranas and the epics.” Mani further states:

The literary writings in all Indian Languages are indebted to the Epics and the Puranas in more than one way—their form, content, ideas and ideologies...direct and indirect allusions to Puranic episodes, characters, events are frequently to be met with the literary writings of all Indian languages. (vii)

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This realization throws light on the ways Indian narrative strategies have been shaped and used by the Indian authors in contemporary times. Many a time, such a realization has also been used as a workable source by the CIWE authors. Perhaps, some of the best efforts had come from Rushdie and Ghosh, who mostly used the Puranic and Epical mode of narration to idealize their sense of Indianness. As the Puranas seek to ordering the world from a particular perspective, they are to be considered highly selective and skillful exhibition of ideas and worldviews. Against such a background, a discussion of the various aspects of oral storytelling in contemporary writing by an Indian provides an interesting thread to understand the revival of storytelling which is prevalent culture in India since antiquity.

To discuss the use of orality and storytelling in Rushdie’s novels, his ‘pseudo Indian story-telling techniques’, hailed by many as a new beginning in IWE, not only signify the ideas of Indianness to non-Western readers but also demonstrate the impossibility of any immediate use of the native Indian materials in the Western world. His novels, besides reflecting on his career as an author, also enable him to reveal that literature is never ahistorical, or occurs independently of cultures, but actually grows out of specific cultural exchange of a particular historical moment. This technique is so revelatory that it has made Rushdie’s contemporaries and successors rethink about the various possible ways to represent India in their writings through storytelling. It is interesting to note that from \( G \) to \( LFL \), Rushdie’s attempt has been to tell stories. Consequently, while going through his novels, one not only encounters Rushdie’s own use of storytelling as a method of narrating experience, but also comprehends how the significance of his novels actually emerge from the ideas of storytelling that he abundantly uses in almost all his novels.

Rushdie’s heavy reliance on the notion of Indianness in his fictions, based on the ancient Indian oral story telling tradition, is acknowledged to David
Brooks in an interview in 1984. In his reply to a question placed by Brooks, Rushdie stated:

One of the strange things about oral narratives—which I did look at very closely before writing *Midnight's Children* is that you find there a form which is thousands of years old, and yet which has all the methods of modernist novel, because when you have somebody who tells you a story at the length, a story which is told from the morning to the night, it probably contains roughly as many words as a novel, and during the course of the story it is absolutely acceptable that the narrator will even so often enter his own story and chat about it...it seems to me that when you look at the old narrative and use it as I tried to do, as the basis of a novel, you become a modernist writer by becoming a traditional one. 11

This has been an excellent rendering of Rushdie's take on storytelling.12

But while dealing with the issue of storytelling one cannot but refer to the allegorical presentations of various characters and situations. For example, Saleem Sinai in *MC* states: “I buried myself in fairy tales. Hatim Tai and Batman, Superman and Sinbad helped to get me through the nearly nine years.” (153). But, besides resorting to allegories, Rushdie has used oral storytelling as a most viable narrative technique. It is also because he makes storytelling the particular mode for exploring the roots of many of his fictional characters. The tendency to tell stories is to be traced in his first novel *G* in which he portrays the character of Flapping Eagle, a young Amerindian, who becomes immortal after drinking a magic fluid. The combination of fantasy, storytelling and folklore makes this novel look like an epic adventure, a technique to be used in some greater range in his later novels like *HSS* and *LFL*. In *G*, the character called Elfrida deliberates on stories and storytelling like this:

Stories should be life like, slightly frayed at the edges full of loose ends and lives juxtaposed by accident rather than some grand design. Most of life has no meaning—so it must surely be a distortion of life to tell tales in which every single element is meaningful? And for a story to distort life is nothing sort of criminal, for it may then distort one's own view of life. (141)
Listening to a story Elfrida again tells: “I don’t like it...its too pretty, too neat. I do not care for stories that are so, so right...everything that happens to one.”

(141) It foreshadows what Rushdie stated in MC:

And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an access of intertwined lives events miracles places, rumours, so dense a comingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been swallower of lives; and to know me, you’ll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me...(9)

It needs to be mentioned here that Rushdie takes interest in writing the crowd, typical of India, and the different stories told by the people.

The ideas of orality and storytelling are explicit in the very first line of MC: “I was born in the city of Bombay...once upon a time” (9). In the context of MC however, the presence of the listener Padma affirms the suggestive orality of Saleem’s narrative, its repetitions, its accumulations of details, its anticipations. Rukmini Bhaya Nair discusses that even gossiping exhibits another form of storytelling as she writes:

Writing within a broadly subalternist paradigm which stressed the politically unsettling power of rumour in nationalist discourse, I tried to innumerate a number of features of gossip...gossip, conventional medium of private criticism was...transgressively utilized by Rushdie as a weapon against the claims of historical ‘truth’ and religious morality. (Nair, Rushdie’s Midnight’s 50)

Padma’s role in Saleem’s narrative too is very significant. Saleem states: “Just as Scheherazade, depending on her very survival on leaving prince Shahryer eaten up by curiosity, used to do night after night! I will begin at once.” (24). But then again he reiterates: “But here is Padma at my elbow, bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened–next:” (38). This is what epitomizes the use of orality in MC.

In S, once again Rushdie deals with the form of oral storytelling, a mode that intentionally confuses the various brands of orality playing within the narrative of the novel. At some times, the novel parodies the telling of fairy tales
about uncertain ancestry of Omar Khayyam Shakil at a family gathering, while at other times, it employs the quite different oral form of the narrative asides typically used by the contemporary Western authors. S also invokes the orality of the Qur'an, the holy book of the official religion of Pakistan. Rushdie intrudes into the narrative and states: “Fortunately however, I am only telling a short of modern fairy tale, so that’s all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken, either.” (70). Then again he states: “Every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales...I must get back to my fairy story, because things have been happening while I’ve been talking too much” (71). Rushdie’s views on storytelling as a means to counter censorship is to be discussed in more details as he also became famous for raising cudgels against all sorts of state-sponsored censorship against authors all around the world.

Rushdie’s *TSV* is yet another excellent example of his art of storytelling. It is basically the story of two migrants Gabreel Farishta and Saladin Chamsa. In this novel too, Rushdie has deliberately used ideas of reincarnation, phoenix from ashes, resurrection, transmigrations, avatars of Vishnu, metamorphosis of Jupitar, the progress of the soul through successive cycles of life and so on. The idea however is to represent the migrant sensibility and the realities faced by a migrant. Rushdie’s playfulness is implicit in the way he trivializes the grandeur of Satan into ‘Chaitan’—the little boy playing with everything around. In delirium Gibreel’s transformation into Mahound is significant for Rushdie’s proposed idea of ‘metamorphosis’ (123). Perhaps, the most important story of the novel is that of the “Satanic Verses” themselves. As the narrator writes:

This is what he has heard in his listening, that he has been tricked—that the divine disguised himself as the archangel, so the verses he memorized/recited were not godly but satanic. He returns to the city as quickly as possible to strike them from the record so that they survive in one or two unreliable collection of old tradition and orthodox interpreters will try and unwrite their story. (123)
Rushdie’s art of storytelling becomes evident when the narrator describes each and every incident of the novel in a form typical of storytelling.

It is however in the novella *HSS* that one gets to read about Rushdie’s mature take on the art of storytelling. In this text, one encounters one of the most significant questions posed by Rushdie the author, as Horoun contemplates: “Where did all these stories come from?” (16). Answering to this question Rashid, often admired by many as the “Ocean of Notions” in the text, tells him that he “gets them through a Water Queen’s Tap from the Story Sea. It so happened that one day Horoun asked this question and then all hell broke loose” (18). Interesting to note that Horoun’s mother Soraya’s refusal to sing is connected to the impracticability of his father Rashid’s stories, followed by her elopement with Mr. Sengupta. Horoun, who is now undergoing utter sense of loss, is unable to get out of the question: “Whats the use of telling stories that aren’t even true” (20). It is exactly the same question that causes Rashid to lose his talent for storytelling. However, unlike his mother Soraya, Horoun celebrates his father’s talent for storytelling like this: “Horoun often thought of his father as a Juggler, because his stories were really lots of different tales juggled together, and Rashid kept them going in a short of dizzy whirl, and never made a mistake”(16).

Followed by his own confusion on whether the water Genie Iff is ‘real’, Horoun finds it impossible to accept his contact with the fantastic world of the Genie. This confusion also reflects on the illusion vs reality dichotomy faced by any fiction writer of contemporary times. So, to convince himself Horoun argues: “The real world was full of magic, so magical worlds could easily be real” (50). This novel also reminds of Bhatta Somadeba’s *Katha Sarit Sagar*. The Ocean of Stories or the Land of Kahani, where Horoun is transported by Water Genie, is a fantastic place where all the stories of the world are combined together. Readers are reported, because these stories were held here in fluid form, they have retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up...
with other stories so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of Stories was much more than a storehouse of information, it was not dead but alive (72). Finally, the restoration of Rashid’s storytelling power, is a victorious moment for storytelling as the people of the valley of K are now free to choose their leader they liked (207). Thus, in this novella, Rushdie addresses many philosophical and political aspects of writing fiction at a time when he was spending life in exile.

*LFL* is a sequel to *HSS*. Once again, Rushdie’s art of telling stories becomes apparent in the very first line of the novel: “There was once, in the city of Kahani in the land of Alifbay, a boy named Luka who has two pets…”(1). In fact, Luka is projected as the younger brother of Horoun. Rashid tells Luka:

You all boys should know that Man is the storytelling animal, and that in stories are his identity, his meaning and his life blood. Do rats tell tales? Do porpoises have narrative purposes? Do elephants phantasise? You know as well as I do that they do not. Man alone burns with books. (34)

In one sense, Rashid Khalipha resembles Rushdie himself, as he reflects on Rushdie’s own views about creating fiction out of the ocean of stories. But the novel foreshadows another danger that an old father may not live to see his son grow up. In *HSS* it was the storyteller who threatened, but in *LFL* it is the storyteller himself who is at risk. Thus, once again the presence of a fantastic and the oral have been brought back by Rushdie in this novel to narrativise his experiences of an internationally acclaimed but controversial fiction writer.

*TMLS* also deals with many other aspects of storytelling by Rushdie. Through the character called Aurora, Rushdie reflects on the dichotomy between realism and fantasy. As an Indian artist she had an easy option to follow distinguished artists such as the filmmaker Sukumar Sen (or Satyajit Ray), and the writers like Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Sadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chugtai — all who had been committed realists. But Magic Realism influenced Aurora and Vasco Miranada most. She rejected mimesis and instead chose the ‘epic fabulist’ style as it best enabled her to express her true nature and capture
the dreamlike wonder of the waking world' (173-174). Similarly, Vasco’s urge to Aurora to avoid mimesis is best reflected in the following: “Forge those dam fool realists, the real is always hidden—isn’t it? Inside a miraculously burning bush. Life is fantastic. Paint that...” (174). Thus, the technique of Aurora and Vasco hint at those of Rushdie. Viney Kirpal writes that “Magic Realism or the Epic fabulist manner or the mythic romantic mode to which she (Aurora) had turned obsessively since she was thirteen, had freed her as an artist. She could mix history, family, politics, fantasy with ‘the great crowds at VT or Church gate stations” without having to visit them in actuality (Kirpal 334). As Magic Realism allows the artist to fuse ordinary events with the fantastic and the dreamlike, it gave Aurora (and so Rushdie) ample scope to represent India—her most favourite theme.

*TMLS* finally asserts the necessity to tell stories: “In the end, stories are what’s left us, we are no more than the few tales that persist” (110). In *HSS*, Iff laments that the inhabitants of the ‘palimpsest’ land of Kahani had failed in their responsibility: “We are the guardian of the Ocean and we did not guard it” (146). A similar kind of concern underlies Rushdie’s *TMLS* in which the moor is saddened to find that the multiplicity of Bombay is lost because people have failed to protect it (373). If freedom of speech is to be rationalized, then the hybridity of stories should also be preserved. Therefore, the pertinent issue is that the sources of stories need to be protected at all cost. However, this book has remarkable resemblances with “The Wizard of Oz”¹⁴, which Rushdie considers an ‘authorless text’. Rushdie himself stated: “If the Wizard of OZ is art it’s extremely difficult to say who the artist was” *(WO* 13). However, it is to be mentioned that in texts like *HSS, TMLS,* and *LFL,* Rushdie is experimenting more with the ideas of storytelling than with orality as such.

Rushdie’s reliance on oral and folk narratives can be most significantly traced through his use of the carnivalalesque and the clownish figure in a later novel like *STC.* In this novel, Rushdie marks the beginning of the comic vitality
as well as the deliberate irreverence in Indian English novels. He opines that such a purpose can be best served by bringing in the clownish figure of Indian folk narratives, like one finds in the demonstrations of the Bhand Pather in a Kashmiri village like Pachigam, back to Indian English novels. He states: "The kind of clown protagonist is so common in Indian folklore, and village theatre and all that and it is amazing that it never became a protagonist of a novel..." (Kumar 223). This kind of discussions help to understand that Rushdie is an devoted storyteller, and the multiple narrative strategies borrowed from multiple sources as explicit in this novel only help him to reflect on his role as an author.

In his keynote speech with The Lavin Agency, Rushdie discusses the importance of storytelling by arguing that one lives in an age in which the gap between the private life and public life has never been so small. This gives a new dimension to storytelling because world events impact even family lives. The best way to understand one’s self is to realize the fact that one is a storytelling animal, because, one constantly narrates oneself to each other. Stories define kinship relationship and when one dies one turn into one of those stories. So, stories are what remain in the air. Thus, it has a deep connection to one’s most fundamental nature as human being. Rushdie also makes use of painting as part of his storytelling. His research helps to understand that the Mughals had brought artists from every part of India to work on the paintings. But the interesting point is that individual identity of the artists was submerged to create an Indian painting which could be shown like a movie. Reference here is made to Hamza Nama15 (70). It is to be noted that the use of painting as part of storytelling is also available in novels like TMLS and TEF. Besides, his borrowing from Somdeva’s Katha Sarit Sagar, a text which is probably longer than the Arabian Nights, is quite an obvious source of influence in all his fictional works.

Anyone reading the novel TGB will also agree that it is an amazing book on storytelling. This novel presents an interesting parallelism between Indian and European mythology. The important point is that the book is written for his son
Milan in the tradition of HSS. The narrator in this novel wonderfully reflects on the world of stories like this: “I devoured children version of the Norse Saga, the epic journeys made in a flying boat called Skidblandir, the adventures of Hatim Tai and Haroun Al Rashid, Sinbad and Marco Polo, Rama and Laksmana and the Kurus and Pandabas etc.” (74). Thus, it is quite pertinent to state that Rushdie, through most of his fictional works, approaches CIWE from significant perspectives which are necessarily Indian. And the use of oral storytelling as part of his approach asserts his notion of Indianness again and again.

Unlike Salman Rushdie, oral storytelling in Amitav Ghosh has to be studied in connection with the sub-cultures of South East Asia which are often not visible in the mainstream historical records. Thus, the idea of orality in Ghosh makes sense under two aspects: a. Orality vs literacy, b. Orality as a different but positive medium of cultural life. Most often, the idea of orality is seen in terms of the first aspect as discussed by Walter J Ong’s in his book *Orality and Literacy*. However, Ghosh’s preoccupation with the second aspect is one of the interesting threads which helps to locate many of his concerns as an author. James Scott observes, in the context of South East Asia for more than two thousand years, the inhabitants have lived in close contact with many traditions as well as oral histories of writing (Scott, *The Art* 220). And Ghosh would be much interested in such a store-house of knowledge following his interests in history and anthropology. The fact that oral culture survives only through constant retelling, also reflects current interests, current power relations, and the views of societies. James Scott also talks about the advantages of oral culture which rests on the idea of flexibility and adaptation. This aspect of orality is so movingly portrayed by Ghosh in most of his novels and more specifically in *THT*. Thus, instead of the idea of ‘written’ communication that gradually becomes an instrument of domination and exploitation in the hands of the superiors in society, Ghosh seems to have relied more on orality, because, that helps him to turn towards narrating the ‘stories’ which are not available in written historical records.
Ghosh’s first novel *TCR* is written in the circular form of Indian storytelling which uses a method of telling a story within a story to explore the theme of circularity. In this novel, Ghosh is perhaps trying to mean that “science can only tell you about things as they are; not about what they might become” (20). Then he makes a distinction between rationalism and narrative—rationalism suggesting putting the oral into the realm of the written, and narrative suggesting the ever-increasing significance of the oracular. In *TCR*, Ghosh problematizes the notion of modern science by introducing into its narrative pseudo-sciences such as phrenology and criminology, and by referring to the local myths, legends and anecdotes. This technique exemplifies Ghosh’s unique style of making connections among alternative ways of looking at the universe. One of the examples of storyteller, used by Ghosh in this novel, is the character called Zindi who is prominent in the 2nd and 3rd part of the novel. When she tells stories, it was only in her telling that ‘they took shape, changed from mere incidents to palpable things, and in introducing variation into her ‘litany of stories’. It was like a process of a potter’s thumb on clay—changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it” (212-213). Here, the subjective nature of ‘reality’ as well as of ‘narrative’ is emphasized by the fact that one can only articulate one’s experience of the world through language. Thus, Ghosh reflects on the point that language is integral to storytelling, and a story gains its status as a story only in terms of its telling. However, the success of this novel also lies in its *Panchatantra* or *Thousand and One Nights* like capacity for juggling a number of stories.

In his “March of the Novel through History”, Ghosh talks of the *Panchatantra* “to be second only to the Bible in the extent of its global diffusion” (Ghosh, *Imam* 295), and also mentions that it engendered “some of the best known of Middle Eastern fables, including a major parts of *The Thousand and One Nights*” (295). Then he also states that even the Jataka stories, compiled originally in India, came to be diffused throughout Southern and Eastern Asia” (295). Thus, although *TCR* is structurally not so tight, such views of Ghosh, very
aptly describe how storytelling has been used as a method in this novel. As Ghosh argues:

Everywhere these stories went they were freely and fluently adapted to local circumstances. Indeed in a sense the whole point of the stories was this translatability – the dispensable and inessential nature of their locations. What held them together and gave them their appeal was not where they happened but how—the narrative, in other words...In this ways of storytelling, it is story that gives places their meaning. (Ghosh, *The Imam* 296)

There are two other possible ways to discuss the importance of storytelling in Amitav Ghosh’s works. For example, a novel like *TSL* interrogates the authenticity of colonial and nationalist historiography and emphasizes the fiction people create around their lives. Besides, this novel also records the vivid details of individual memories that do not necessarily correspond with the documented history. The interesting blend of storytelling and narratives in *TSL* is seen in terms of how narratives breed more narratives, and following this how location becomes temporal. Tridib tells the narrator:

One could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust, a pure, painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh that carried one beyond the limits of one’s mind to other times and other places, and even if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one’s image in the mirror. (29)

And the important point here is that desire, for its fulfillment, also necessitates constant re-telling. The narrator and his stories in *TSL* are represented as the products of diverse cultural histories. Ghosh makes it clear that one’s choice cannot simply transcend the norms of other people’s stories. The space of *TSL* is one where different stories collide to make themselves heard sometimes with frightening effects.18 These stories usually retell the lives of the ordinary families living intimately. And even when they cross national boundaries, such stories remain confined to houses, streets, or small
neighbourhoods. Thus, Ghosh substitutes stories with history. While doing this, he also contrasts the sense of a settled place with the sense of displacement in a migrant. As an author, he seeks to assert that stories often speak about their 'invented' nature. They can be made up, can have multiple versions, or be granted multiple endings. All these aspects are quite explicit in TSL. In this novel, out of the several stories about Tridib in circulation, his friends at adda chose the one that least threatens their self-esteem. Even the narrator at the age of eight, shows awareness on the fictive status of narratives in general. This also means that stories can be created, altered and ended at will to suit the context. Ghosh’s attempt to encapsulate every event as a separate story, often within another story, illustrates Tridib’s insights about the omnipresence of narratives in TSL: “Everyone lives in a story...they all lived in stories, because stories are all there to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose...” (182).

Ghosh’s TCC presents yet another interesting example of orality and storytelling. Calcutta here is represented as the city of ‘secrets’ which live in the act of telling as they “whisper life into humdrum street corners and the dreary alleyways...” (21). Like one finds with TCR, TCC is also modeled on the story-within-a-story framework. Although the dominant storyline centers on the sudden disappearance of Murugan, the actual story centers around different versions of the mystery related to the discovery of Malaria parasites supposed to be made by Sir Ronald Ross. Urmila claims to have read in one of Phulboni’s [a writer] essays: “Whether life lies in words or in images, in speech or sight. Does a story come to be in the words that I conjure out of my mind or does it live already somewhere, enshrined in mud and clay—in an image, that is, the crafted mimicry of life” (189). Although not very explicit, this novel too presents ideas of circularity as Murugan tells Urmila that one has to be careful to pick the right time to turn the last page. He also utters the following lines:

See for them, writing “The End” to this story is the way they hope to trigger the quantum leap into the next. But for that to happen two things have to coincide...
precisely: the end credits have to come up at exactly the same instant that the story is revealed to whoever they are keeping it for... or maybe they’re waiting on a technology that’ll make it easier and quicker to deliver their story to whoever they are keeping it for. (180-181)

Murugan here is the fictional storyteller and his ‘search’ is actually helping to make connections among the various other stories of the novel. Once he told Antar that “[k]nowledge is self-contradictory;...to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something we have already changed what one thinks one knows...so one only knows history” (88). Such a view also means the impossibility of an ultimate knowledge. Ghosh makes some remarkable comments on the use of oral storytelling in TCC in his interview with Neluka Silva and Alex Tickell. When asked if he is consciously drawing from the ever-changing oral narratives of the South East Asian tradition, Ghosh replies in the following way:

Yes and no. There was a time when I used to think to myself, ‘How can I tell the story in an oral form?’ But to tell you the truth, more and more the sort of voice that I find really useful comes to me from prewar and postwar Bengali writing. In the Calcutta Chromozome, in the long section where Phulboni the writer goes into the countryside, and has that odd experience—there I was writing quite self-consciously in the Bengali mode of the 1930s and 40s. I told myself, ‘Wouldn’t it be fun to deploy that apparatus.’ It was really fun to do, and I was just hearing it in my head, in Bengali. To come back to the question of the oral thing, we always think of Indian narratives as oral, but I don’t know what that means for me or any other Indian writer, because people of our background very rarely hear stories told in that way that, say, religious stories are told. Most of the time we encounter them through written texts of some kind. What is really interesting is that the voice Bengali fiction adopts is a very intimate form of address... The texture of the prose has a kind of warmth which is very different from what you get in English. (Silva and Tickell, Amitav Ghosh 220-21)

Perhaps, Amitav Ghosh is at his best with the idea of storytelling in THT. The character called Nirmal writes in his letter to Kanai: “To think of all the
years when I had nothing but time and yet wrote not one word. And now like
some misplaced, misgendered Scheherzade I am trying to starve the night off
with a flaying, fleeting pen..." (148). Once Kanai starts reading Nirmal’s diary,
many stories, of the ‘subaltern’ like Kushum, start gaining narrative space. This
novel is an important example of oral storytelling represented by the story of Bon
Bibi. Ghosh has tried to express why certain stories are so important in the daily
life of the common people of the tide country or the Sundarbans. The story of
Bon Bibi\textsuperscript{21}, which is a superstitious story, finds its place in the common parlance
of the people of the tide country.

Fredric Jameson argues that all third world texts are necessarily allegorical
and hence they should always be read as national allegories. Such an argument
also implies that the story of the individual character allegorises the public third
world culture and society (Jameson 69). This can be seen as a fitting response to
the different types of narrative techniques used by authors like Salman Rushdie
and Amitav Ghosh. Thus, the allegorical presentation of the Indian nation
becomes important while discussing storytelling as a representational mode in
CIWE\textsuperscript{22}. In terms of themes, techniques and style, colonialism and nationalism
provide the novels of Rushdie and Ghosh a grand epic sweep. It is because, they
access India through memory and that is why perhaps, they have relied more on
invention than on personal experience. Both of them are writing as immigrants,
both literally and metaphorically. That is why the child figure remains prominent
in almost all fictional works of both the authors.

Both Rushdie and Ghosh perhaps feel that story-telling is the process by
which families begin. Rushdie adheres to this idea to such an extent that each one
of his novels is about the way we create and tell stories. But Rushdie, in most
cases, has explained his indebtedness to the chains of stories like which are
available in epics like the \textit{Mahabharata} and the \textit{Ramayana}, the \textit{Decameron} and
the \textit{Thousand and One Nights}, \textit{Don Quixote} and \textit{Gargantua and Pantagruel} and
so on.\textsuperscript{23} Moreover, both Rushdie and Ghosh display certain common impulses
while narrating stories—be it Rushdie’s *TEF* or Ghosh’s *SOP*. But, it is business that brings people closer, and it is in the marketplace where stories are told. Thus, storytelling can be perceived as a kind of commodity meant for exchange. Moreover, in order to represent the multilayered and plural realities of India, Rushdie and Ghosh had to seek for not one but many narrative styles. In this context, Amit Choudhuri provides an interesting remark on Rushdie’s style of writing:

Rushdie’s style rejecting nuance, delicacy and inwardness for multiplicity and polyphony, and the propensity of his imagination towards magic, fairy tales and fantasy and the apparent non-linearity of his narration—all seem to be emblematic of a non-Western mode of discourse that is at once contemporaneously postcolonial and anciently, inescapably Indian. Again the emphasis on the plural and the multivocal is postmodern. Indian life is plural, garrulous, rambling, lacking a fixed center, and the Indian novel must be the same. (Choudhuri 115)

He further observes that one of the most useful ways to assign Indianness to postcolonial Indian English novel is to place its ‘magical’ subject matter and the non-realist narrative mode in the lineage of epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and texts like the *Thousand and One Nights* (116). Hence, the revival of the interest on orality and storytelling in Indian English novels.

But this is also true that there is a marked difference between a traditional Indian storytelling as available in the epics and the post-colonial Indian English novels. As Cleva Kanaganayakam writes:

The *Mahabharata* is a sprawling epic whose teleology is framed by hundreds of digressions, the supernatural, the fantastic, the mythical, and so forth. All these reappear in Rushdie. The crucial difference is that the epics are naturalized and have remained so for centuries. They are not perceived to be ‘real’ but they are not considered fantastic either. They may not be a part of contemporary reality, but they are a version of ‘truth’. Rushdie’s work does not occupy that particular space. (Kanaganayakam 160)
The mythic imagination from which the epics originally sprang was disturbingly amoral and estranging, but the postcolonial Indian novel is rooted in middle class conscience and founded on humanistic ventures. Such a venture also rehearses a national narrative of colonialism and independence and the idea of India as a recognizable totality (Choudhuri 116). So, while analyzing orality and storytelling in the novels of Rushdie and Ghosh, one must be careful to understand the ethos of the postcolonial Indian novels in English. Regarding the revival of the interest in ancient Indian narrative tradition to explore contemporary India, an attempt made by the authors of CIWE to nativise postmodernism is quite explicit in their return to epics, Puranic or other Indian storytelling structures. The postmodern use of Indian intertext by Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh has further advanced this point. But, how far these diasporic authors have succeeded despite their commitment to postmodernism, is a matter of further investigation.

End Notes:

1 Walter J. Ong in his essay "Literacy and Orality in our Times" too argues that oral communication is close to human life, and is both empathetic and participatory. While, written communication tends towards reification, objectification, and binary stratification. This helps us to understand why the Vedas were kept as part of the oral communication.

2 The six characteristics of Postmodern writing are a. Digressions and juxtapositions of the oral storyteller, b. Parody of identifiable political villain, c. Novel is 'history of the present', d. Art has a functional role in political and social life, e. Roots in tradition, f. Quotation from high cultural forms of epics, national legends and popularize it (qtd. in Kirpal 4).

3 We find that any discussion of orality in India begins with the transmission of the Vedic texts. The Vedas were mainly oral as the Brahmins did not want them to be written for fear that they will fall into wrong hands. While the Puranas (total 18) can be best described as texts that deal with any topic that one could imagine. The Puranas are the exclusive properties of the Indian storytellers of the villages. They basically tell the same stories to suit different contexts. My
intention in this chapter is to establish a connection between this significant narrative culture of India and the narrative mode popularised by the CIWE authors like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh.

4 But my purpose in the thesis is not to find out if Rushdie and Ghosh, while adopting the unique style of Indian storytelling in many of their novels, carried out any systematic research on the various traditions of storytelling available in India since ancient times, but to examine how both the authors adopt this background as part of their representational mode in some of their novels. However, one should also accept that storytelling in their novels becomes a more professional and fashionably commercialized activity.

5 Thomas Boomesrhine in his book *Story Journey* seeks to find answers to such a question. His argument is that story is a primary language of experience. Telling and listening to a story have the same structure as the experience itself. He also opines that the episodes of our life take place one after another just like a story and one of the ways we know each other is by telling our stories.

6 Depending on the narrative methods used, as many as three hundred versions of the *Ramayana* are known to have existed so far. The oldest version is generally recognized to be the Sanskrit version attributed to the sage Valmiki. See A. K. Ramanujan’s "Three hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation", in Paula Richman edited *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991.

7 The *Mahabharata* became part of a large research project undertaken by The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute of Pune. The edition of the *Mahabharata* compiled by scholars like V. S. Sukhtankar, S. K. Belvalkar, S. K. De, Prof. R. N. Dandekar, enjoy the status of one of the most prestigious and appreciated editorial works of the world. It took five decades to complete the book and the scholars consulted nearly 1,259 manuscripts of the epic before final publication.

8 The idea of epic itself is different in India. In the West, an epic is a long story about a character who undergoes many experiences in his metaphoric journey. That character is human/half human often supported and assisted by divine figures. But, in the Indian epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, many of the central characters themselves are divine. They believe that existence itself is Maya—the play of the divine. Moreover, in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the distinction among epic, mythology, legend, and history usually get dissolved. This merging of the divine and the human is really so appealing to the modern Indian English authors.
'Sthalapurana' in the context of 'Great Indian Puranic Traditions' tells the origin of particular Tamil Shiva Temples or shrines. However, with the passage of time, it came to be associated with tales of places of worship in general. Almost all the gods and goddesses are worshipped in the temples and each temple has its own significance and tradition. Thus, 'Sthalapurana' explains the glorious places which attain significance as sacred spots. I assume that Raja Rao is the one who, for the first time, uses narrative as means to claim national identity and self-assertion. A number of books like Students' Britannica India: Select Essays by Dale Hoiberg and Indu Ramchandani, and A Companion to Indian Fiction in English edited by Pier Paolo Piciucco have addressed this issue in some detail.

For Raja Rao, India is "not a country (desa), it is a perspective (darsana), a metaphysical ideas (Meaning of India, 17). But for Rushdie, it is most important to examine "whether India was one nation or several" (The Hindu, August 15, 1997).

Rushdie undoubtedly borrows the technique of storytelling from Indian folktales and epics. But he also subverts the purpose of such storytelling and manages to provide a very complicated version of reality. As Saleem Sinai in MC argues: "Reality is a question of perspective, the further you go from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems, but as you approach the present it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (165). Rushdie explicates this by referring to the point that in a vast country like India the constant mingling of great and little traditions has produced certain vision of reality through which facts are fictionalized, and truth made incredible. This is the technique Rushdie uses in all his novels. So, fantasy as it seems, is not simply a literary method but a natural psychic process of grappling with truth and reality.

Rushdie in this novel goes heavily on Khattam-Shud (who resembles Ayatollah Khomeini), who is an enemy of books and is out to silence the writers and their imagination.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz is a children's novel written by L. Frank Baum. The story is based on the adventures of a young girl named Dorothy Gale in the Land of Oz, who is swept away from her Kansas farm home in a cyclone. The novel is one of the best-known stories in American popular culture and has been widely translated.

The Hamzanama is based on the legendary exploits of Amir Hamza, the uncle of the prophet of Islam. The Mughal emperor Akbar commissioned an enormous manuscript with illustrations.
which also became the attraction for the West. The painted stories are drawn from a long-established oral tradition, written mainly in Persian.

16 James C. Scott argues that the oral tradition is inherently more democratic than a written one for two reasons: A. the ability to read and write is typically less broadly distributed than the ability to tell stories; B. there is rarely any simple way to ‘adjudicate’ among various telling of oral history.

17 It was believed that in the beginning was the mouth, the source of talk as well as words. Gradually, there emerged narratives flowing in and out of the oral. This was further to be apparently superseded by the ‘written’ to transgress time. Orality thus suggested a kind of circularity that was never doomed to finitude.

18 In this context, TSL is a dialogic novel. In the essay “Desh Kothay? Amitav Ghosh Tells Old Wives Tales”, Anjali Gera states that many critics tend to agree that the master narratives of imperialism and nationalism, based on European historiographic methods, have almost erased the little stories of small places. It is important to note that Ghosh searches for these ‘little stories’ in family histories and neighbourhood, and subsequently digs up histories that are buried under the nationalist versions (Khair 110).

19 Amit Choudhuri in the essay “In the Waiting Room of History” writes: “Never was adda so theorized as it was in Calcutta as both a significant component and symptom of Bengali Bourgeois culture in the first three quarters of the 20th century” (67). Also see Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincialising Europe for a better understanding of adda in the formation of the Bengali culture.

20 Circularity means a process which is closed upon itself in form. It refers to systems that are self-organizing, self-referential, self-sustaining. Circularity as a technique occurs frequently in Indian English fiction. One example is TCOR by Amitav Ghosh. The last line of the novel: “Hope is the beginning” helps in understanding what circularity is.

21 According to this story in THT the twins Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli, were born in the holy city of Medina to a Sufi Faqir Ibrahim through the intervention of Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel forecasted that they had been chosen for divine mission, that they were to travel from Arabia to the “country of eighteen tides” – atthero bhatir desh—in order to make this region fit for human habitation. Subsequently, both set off for the mangrove forest of Bengal dressed in the simple ropes of Sufi mendicants. However, the jungle of the ‘the country of eighteen tides’ were under the command of the demon king Dokkhin Rai, who was antagonistic to human, and who kept within his power every living being in the island. With the arrival of Bon Bibi, there
began a battle in which the demon king was defeated and the merciful Bon Bibi divided the island into two parts—one for herself and the other for Dokkhin Rai to maintain a balance between human settlement and wilderness. Thus, Bon Bibi became the tutelary deity of the island. (*THT* 103)

22 In his Interview in *Scritpsi*, 3:2/3 (1985): 107-108, Rushdie refutes the traditional idea of storytelling in his novels and states: "Allegory asks readers to make a translation, to uncover a secret text that has not actually been written. In that sense I don't think my books operate as allegories."

23 Joel Kuortty states that almost all of Rushdie's prose is encyclopedic containing a hoard of literary, cinematic, mythological and other allusions, references and quotations, collection of material from multiple sources—Indian, European, American, African and so on. They work as palimpsest texts assigning new meaning to the text themselves, and how such palimpsestic works depend on the reader's ability of perceptions (16-17).

24 In the article "Novel Form in Ocean of Stories" Mulk Raj Anand reiterates that the creative imaginations of the bardic poets after the Arayan invasion, concentrated on the recital in the Vedic and Post Vedic eras, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The theme of such epics is mainly power struggle. But the *Mahabharata* stories are also fictional as we find in the tale of Nala and Damayanti, Savitri rescuing Satyvana from Yama etc. In fact, commentators of early medieval history laid down a dictum that all new fictions must be written about characters in the *Mahabharata*. However, fables and tales of words and deeds of Buddha were equally famous. Brihut Katha stories were told to common folks, Katha Sarit Sagar or Ocean of Stories told by Soma Deva to a dejected Rani were also functional for centuries (Dhawan 21-22).
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