CHAPTER II

RETURN TO THE MYTHICAL ROOTS

In the endeavour to retrieve the past, the new generation of Indian English writers use myths in an elaborate way. These novelists adopt postmodern techniques in their fictions. Their novels dwell on the theme of the quest for the self and as they trace roots and routes, they revive and retell myths. Revisiting the past includes recollection of stories, myths and legends that are inseparable from the culture to which one belongs. These myths manifest as unwritten historical records of culture and tradition. The blurring of the boundaries between history and novel, or fact and fiction introduces a mixture of fact and fantasy, of myth and reality, in the depiction of contemporary politics and history. Myths are stories that are handed down from generations to generations as seeds of wisdom. They are rooted in religious or common beliefs. The process of going down the memory lane to re-capture the lost identity involves the recollection of myths, tales and legends that are linked to one’s identity. In a country like India, the native myths, folk songs and art forms become not only a reflection of its rich culture and tradition, but a way of retrieving its glorious past. According to Ashis Nandy, “myths are the essence of a culture, it contains history, and it is contemporary and unlike history are amenable to intervention” (59).

In India, myths have traditionally been seen to be more important and have more explanatory power than history, something that was also part and parcel of the twentieth-century Gandhian view. As T. N. Dhar points out, “despite developing flourishing traditions of several indigenous forms of art, literature, theories of aesthetics, and various complex and highly-refined philosophical systems, [India] missed out on developing a well-formulated Indian theory and practice of history”
Nandy remarks that “history can be superfluous and misleading” (59). This accounts for the postcolonial trend of rewriting history in fiction. Writers like Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry and Shashi Tharoor invoke popular Indian myths in their representation of history in fiction. In their novels the search for the self becomes a return to the culture’s mythical roots.

The myths recollected by these authors include not merely culture-specific myths, but a wide array of myths across the globe. Amitav Ghosh links his novel *The Circle of Reason* to the myth of Nachiketa from the Kathopanishad. The myth of Nachiketa’s search for knowledge is seen recreated in modern settings in this novel where the search for the self is the central theme. The soul’s inward journey to seek the truth of Atma or the Self becomes manifest in *The Circle of Reason*. Nachiketa in the Hindu mythology was the son of Vaajashrava, a Brahmin priest who had but one flaw, which was that he was a miser. He tried to please gods by doing a puja. Angry at being questioned by his son on not giving good offerings, the father announced offering him to Yama the God of Death. To keep the father’s word Nachiketa bravely set out to meet Yama and waited for Yama without food and water for three days. Yama was pleased and gave him three boons. The first boon Nachiketa asked for was peace between him and his father, which was immediately granted. The second boon was for knowledge and immortality, which again was granted. The third was the question regarding life and death, which only Yama could answer. Impressed and pleased with the spiritual thirst of a young boy of seven, Yama revealed the knowledge of “Om” to him. The encounter with Yama becomes the moment of self realization to young Nachiketa.

There are other mythic references in the novel. The titles of the three sections “Sattva: Reason,” “Rajas: Passion” and “Tamas: Death” refers to the three gunas of
the Samkhya purana. The play *Chitrangada* by Rabindranath Tagore is selected to be enacted by the diasporic community headed by Dr Verma, a move that allows the community to revive the myth of Chitrangada from the *Mahabharata*. Chitrangada, is one of the wives of Arjuna. Arjuna travelled the length and breadth of India during his term of exile. During his wanderings he reaches the ancient Manipura, a mystic kingdom renowned for its natural beauty. There, he met Chitrangada, the daughter of the king of Manipura, and was moved to seek her hand in marriage. Being the only daughter of the King, the children born of Chitrangada were to be heirs to the throne of Manipura. The King hence demanded that the daughter and her children should not be taken away from Manipura by their father. Arjuna agrees to the plea and weds the princess on this premise. A son, whom they named Babruvahana, was soon born to the couple. The dance drama by Rabindranath Tagore uses the myth but gives it a new perspective.

*The Shadow Lines* portrays the mythical belief in the self and the other, where the other is “upside down,” like the “upside down house” mentioned by Thamma. As in Rushdie’s myth of the birth of the nation, here the myth of borders is rewritten in the context of history. The myth of boundaries as shadow lines explains the diasporic existence in which the migrant belongs neither here nor there. Myths are used to communicate meanings that are profound. Thamma’s “coming to” and “going away” from a nation discloses the myth of boundaries. Ila’s “imaginary lines” that mark the boundaries of her imaginary play home is another example of the creation of myths.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh blends myth and history into science fiction. Rituals and customs associated with subaltern cult practices are revealed in the novel with references to the “puja of Mangala bibi” (*Calcutta* 190). Mangala is another name of Shitala, a goddess widely worshipped in North India. The philosophy
of the transmigration of souls is incorporated into the legends about mysterious cult practices. The novel has references to Valentinian cosmology and to the mythical ultimate deities, the Abyss and the Silence. The Temple of Silence is linked to Valentinian cosmology. Ghosh makes references to the spiritual teachings of the Theosophical Society that attempted to blend the philosophies of the East and the West.

The Sufi myth of the Huma bird is used in the novel *In an Antique Land*. Huma is a legendary bird connected with Iranian and Sufi mythology. It is said to never come to rest, living its entire life flying invisibly high above the earth. It is named as a bird of fortune, since its shadow on a person's head or shoulder would bestow kingship on him. The myth of the Huma bird is used to depict Bomma’s devotion to his master in Ghosh’s novel. The myth of the slave serving the master, like the devotee serving God, is used in this novel to unravel the past. The story of Sidi Abu Kanaka told by Zaghloul is a legend that belongs to the Egyptian culture and is handed down through generations. According to the legend when the canal was being constructed, the path decided upon was hazardous for the villagers. The path was to go across the tomb of the holy man, Sidi Abu Kanaka. The workers failed to break through the tomb and as such had no choice but to alter the route. Thus the villagers were saved. Such legends which attain a mythical stature are part of every culture, and Ghosh weaves some of them into the text of his novel.

As a migrant in Egypt, Amitab was constantly questioned about his native culture. The Indian ritual of worshipping cows is ridiculed in *In an Antique Land*. The Indian practice of cremating the dead bodies was constantly questioned by the natives of Egypt. With the help of an expert on local folklore, the researcher learns that the slave belonged to a matrilineal community of Tulunad with an indigenous culture and
local forms of worship connected to the Bhuta-cult. The folk culture expert points out that “the name ‘Bomma’, in all likelihood… was a diminutive of, Berme, the figure who stood at the pinnacle of the Tuluva pantheon of Bhuta-spirits” (Antique 254). In folklore and legends the Tulu god Bermeru was generally depicted as a deity mounted on a horse. Bhuta Kola worship is an ancient form of worship prevalent among the Tulu-speaking community of southern India. The Bhuta worship has a known history of about eight centuries, and can be traced back to the ancient tribal era. In essence, the spirits or the bhutas worshipped are considered to have supernatural powers. The researcher’s search for the slave’s identity thus becomes a narration of pagan subaltern traditions and practices which were hardly recognised in conventional history.

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh deals with stories of different cultures across the globe. Through Rajkumar the novel moves from Chittagong to Burma and then through Malaya and Rangoon to Calcutta. The novel portrays the life of the Burmese Royal family, and their customs and practices as well as the traditions of the Indian family system with their elaborate wedding rituals and other practices. Descriptions of religious practices and rituals appear along with narration of tales of migration and transformation. The practices connected with the Buddhist faith, for example, appear in the novel as a reference to “Thadin,” the annual three-month period of reflection and abstinence practised by Buddhists. Dolly reads from the scriptures a discourse by Buddha addressed to his son Rahula: “Develop a state of mind like the earth, Rahula, for on the earth all manner of things are thrown, clean and unclean, dung and urine, spittle, pus and blood, and earth is not troubled or repelled or disgusted” (*Glass* 343). There is a reference to Buddha’s first sermon delivered at Sarnath, which Manju remembers as: “Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow;
contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow” (Glass 344). Burma exists as the golden land in the stories that the refugees recollect. Thus the past becomes a myth to the future generations. As Jaya seeks her roots, the Glass Palace of ancient Burma and the Glass Palace studio of modern Burma become metaphors of the juxtaposed past and present.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh revives regional myths. The land of Sundarbans, its culture, its traditions and the concerns of the native people are narrated in this novel. It is through the stories that he hears from others during his first visit and through his uncle Nirmal’s notebook that Kanai comes to know of the tide country. Kanai’s recollection of the performance, *The Glory of Bon Bibi*, narrates the local myth that rules the lives of the inhabitants of the land. Nirmal expresses his frustration with the islanders’ preference for fiction over reality: “You would think that in a place like this people would pay close attention to the true wonders of the reality round them. But no, they prefer the imaginary miracles of gods and saints” (*Hungry* 132). The life of the natives of the tide country whose lives are governed by myths and superstitions is the theme of the novel.

The novel portrays local reality against recorded history. Ghosh presents how myths, legends and stories of the oral tradition give the picture of the reality with a tinge of fantasy. The tide country people have an epic narrative concerning their origin, which they pass down orally. They have a kind of local religion and a goddess called Bon Bibi, who they believe would guard all who are pure in heart. The Irrawady dolphins are believed to be the messengers of Bon Bibi. The purpose of Piya’s visit to the tide country is to study these dolphins. Ghosh yokes science and myth together when the dolphins become messengers of a storm to Piya. Bon Bibi and the rituals associated with her appear to flow seamlessly into the ecological and
cultural histories of the tidal land. According to the legends, Bon Bibi is the daughter of Ibrahim, a fakir from Mecca. When his first wife Phulbibi could not bear any child, Ibrahim married Golalbibi with Phulbibi’s permission and with a promise to fulfil a wish of her in the future. At the same time, Allah decides to send Bon Bibi and Shah Jangali from heaven for a divine mission. He instructs them to take birth as the children of Golalbibi. When Golalbibi becomes pregnant, Ibrahim leaves her in a forest to satisfy his first wife's wish, as he had promised her earlier. Bon Bibi and Shah Jangali are born in the forest to Golalbibi. Allah sends four maids from heaven to take care of them. Golalbibi abandons Bon Bibi in the forest and leaves with Shah Jangali in her arms. Bon Bibi is raised by a doe. After seven years, Ibrahim realizes his mistake and takes back Golalbibi and her two children to Mecca.

The novel includes many legends about how Bon Bibi guards the tide country and saves her devotees. Once, while praying at the mosque of the prophet of Islam, Bon Bibi and Shah Jangali receive two magical hats. With the help of the hats, they fly to the country of eighteen tides, atharo bhatir desh in Hindustani. But, according to another version of the narrative, they were brought to the country of eighteen tides by Gibril, the archangel. After reaching there, Shah Jangali gives the adhan, the call to prayer. The country of eighteen tides called the Sundarbans was under the control of the demon king Dakhin Rai. The sound of adhan reaches his ears. He sends his friend Sanatan Rai to enquire about them. When Sanatan informs him about the duo, he decides to throw them out of his territory. While he was about to go into the battle, his mother Narayani prevents him from going and she herself sets out with her army of ghosts and goblins to fight them. Bon Bibi defeats Narayani after a long battle. But out of mercy, she returns the half of the erstwhile kingdom of Narayani and her son. Narayani become a friend of Bon Bibi. While the inhabited part of the Sunderbans is
believed to be the realm of Bon Bibi, Dakkin Rai is considered the ruler of the deep forest.

Another legend is about two honey collector brothers, Dhona and Mona from a village named Barijhati. Dhona plans to go on an expedition to collect honey in the forests of Sunderbans, but his brother Mona opposes it. Hence he takes along a poor shepherd boy, Dukhe, whose mother asks him to remember Bon Bibi in case of danger. When the fleet reached the Kendokhali char, which was a part of the kingdom of Dakkin Rai, Dona failed to pay respects to Dakkin Rai and wandered for three days, unable to collect any honey. On the third night, Dakkin Rai appears in the dreams of Dhona and demands a human sacrifice. The greedy Dhona agrees to sacrifice Dukhe in exchange for honey and wax. So after collecting enough wax and honey, he leaves Dukhe there and returns to the village. It was when Dukhe started chanting prayers invoking Bon Bibi that he faced Dakkin Rai disguised as a tiger. Bon Bibi along with her brother Shah Jangali defeats Dakkin Rai. Dakkin Rai takes refuge with Bara Khan Ghazi who persuades Bon Bibi not to harm Dakkin Rai. Dukhe is sent home safe with wax and honey. After his return to the village, Dukhe popularised the worship of Bon Bibi in the area. Ghosh retells this myth as he presents the image of an exotic land with its unique culture. From Fokir and Horen the story of Bon Bibi is passed to Kanai and then to Piyali. One could find the story in the book named *The Narratives in Glory of Bon Bibi* or *The Miracles of Bon Bibi*.

The ritualistic worship at Bon Bibi’s shrine, as Nirmal observes, combines both Hindu and Islamic traditions.

Kusum stood by and watched as Fokir and Horen performed a little ceremony. First they fetched some leaves and flowers and placed them in front of the images. Then, standing before the shrine, Fokir began to
recite some kind of chant, with his head bowed and his hands joined in an attitude of prayer. After she had listened for a few minutes, Piya recognized a refrain that occurred over and over again – it contained a word that sounded like “Allah…” But no sooner had she thought this than it struck her that a Muslim was hardly likely to pray to an image like this one. *(Hungry 152)*

This legend handed down through generations is the popular myth believed by the inhabitants of the tide country. The land which is a tiger reserve is depicted as a land where human beings live under constant threats and uncertainties. The geographical conditions contributed to this precarious situation, but the culture had myths and legends to support it. Shiva’s taming of the river Ganges is another myth regarding the origin of the Sundarbans. According to the myth, when the Ganges first descended from the heavens, the force of the cascade was so great that the earth would have been destroyed if it had not been for the god Shiva. He tamed the torrent by catching it in his locks. It is only when the Ganges approaches the Bay of Bengal that it frees itself and separates into thousands of wandering strands. The result is the Sundarbans, an immense stretch of mangrove forest, a half-drowned land where the waters of the Himalayas merge with the incoming tides of the sea. Through these myths, the author presents the picture of a land which is perpetually transformed by the tides.

The tale of Bon Bibi and her worship is also embroiled in history, some of which is handed down through oral traditions and recounted in folk epics of Muslim and Hindu origin. Nirmal’s proposal to use myths in teaching the children at Morichjhapi brings out many myths that connect the east and the west, the old and the new. One of the myths mentioned is the myth of Vishnu’s incarnation as a dwarf. The reference to Tethys, the wife of Oceanus in Greek mythology, links the river dolphin
to the myth. “The creature was the legacy left to the twins, Indus and Ganga, by their mother, Tethys. The rivers nurtured it and made it their own. Nowhere else in the world is Shushuk to be found, but in the twin rivers the Ganga and the Sindhu” (Hungry 194). Ganga also brings in the myth of King Shantanu meeting a beautiful woman on the banks of the great river. The woman was none other than Ganga herself. “A single besotted moment beside the river, and thus was launched a parva of Mahabharata” (Hungry 195). Amitav Ghosh weaves in myths and untold stories on a constantly changing land.

Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies, the first novel in the Ibis trilogy, narrates the story of Poppy cultivation in India. The poppy is a mystical flower with many myths and legends associated with it. In Greek mythology, Hypnos, the god of sleep, created a poppy drink to quell the grief of the corn goddess Demeter whose daughter, Persephone, had been abducted to the underworld. While Demeter mourned, the land was destroyed with famine. Hypnos’s drink forced Demeter into a state of gentle slumber and healing. She awakened comforted, and the world was made green again. In Greco-Roman myths, poppies were used as offerings to the dead. The twin brothers Hypnos and Thanatos, who were the gods of sleep and death, are depicted with a crown of poppies. Throughout history, these flowers have been used as emblems on tombstones to represent eternal sleep.

The journey of Ibis is the main story, and has many subplots. The name Ibis itself has an Egyptian myth associated with it. The African Sacred Ibis in ancient Egypt is particularly associated with the deity Djehty which is commonly referred to in Greek as ‘Thoth,’ often depicted as an ibis-headed man. Ibis was a bird that the ancient Egyptians worshipped. According to legends, the ibis is the last of the wildlife to take shelter before a hurricane and the first to reappear once the storm has passed.
The bird is known for its bravery in hurricanes and is hence an appropriate name for a ship.

In the novel, Neel Rattan Singh is a Rasakhali zamindar who loses his land and is convicted for treachery. Neel reveals the myths about the winds. The life of the Rasakhali zamindars and their obsession with kite flying are recollected. The beliefs and superstitions regarding the winds are unravelled in his memory.

Generations of landed leisure had allowed them to develop their own terminology for this aspect of the elements: in their vocabulary, a strong steady breeze was ‘neel’, blue, a violent nor’easter was purple, and a listless puff was yellow. The squalls that brought the ibis to Hooghly Point were none of these colours: these were the winds of a kind which Halders were accustomed to speak as ‘suqalat’-a shade of scarlet that they associated with sudden reversal of fortune. (Sea 40)

Neel was a devout upholder of tradition, who believed in omens. To him the change in colour of the wind confirmed his change of luck. Belief in omens was a trait of the owners of Rasakhali. “A mouse being the familiar of Ganesh Thakur, god of opportunities and remover of obstacles, the old zamindar had taken the visitation to be an indication of divine will” (Sea 84). The business with Mr. Burnham also commenced with signs of good omen. Ganesha, a god in Hindu mythology had the mouse as his vehicle. According to the Ganesha Purana, Ganesha's mouse, originally a celestial musician named Krauncha, insulted Muni Vamadeva at Lord Indra’s darbar and was cursed to become a mouse. But Krauncha was as big as a mountain and damaged the Ashram of Sage Parâshara. The sage invoked Ganesha who unleashed his noose and looped it round Krauncha’s neck and brought him to Ganesha's feet. Ganesha decided to keep him as his vehicle. But when Ganesha stood on Krauncha he
was too heavy and Krauncha cried out with pain. Ganesha took pity on him and made himself light and Krauncha has happily borne him since. As in the case of other stories in our mythology, this too has many versions. In another version of the myth, Krauncha is a mountain-sized ally of the demon Taraka and is defeated by Taraka and tamed and renamed by Ganesha as Mushika.

The ritual practice of Sati reveals another myth connected with the social evil. In Hindu mythology, Sati was the daughter of Daksha, son of the creator god Brahma. Sati was in love with Shiva, god of destruction, but her father forbade her from having anything to do with him. Her father's opposition eventually led to Sati's death. According to the myth, Daksha held a gathering of the gods to find a husband for his daughter. Sati was to throw a bouquet of flowers into the air and marry the one who caught it. The only god not invited was Shiva. However, Sati prayed to Shiva, who appeared at the gathering and caught the bouquet. Daksha had to permit the two to marry. After Sati's wedding, her father planned a ceremony involving a sacrifice, and again he invited all the gods except Shiva. Unable to persuade her father to invite her husband, Sati threw herself into the sacrificial fire and burned to death. Shiva, overcome by grief, took Sati's body from the flames and began to dance with it. His violent dance threatened to destroy the entire universe. Finally, the god Vishnu cut Sati's body into pieces, and Shiva ended his dance. According to some versions of the story, Vishnu later brought Sati back to life. In the practice of Sati a Hindu widow sacrifices herself on her husband's funeral pyre, as a final and consummate act of loyalty and devotion. This is patterned after the deed committed by this goddess to uphold the honour of her husband. This points out how myths become forerunners of rituals. But in the novel the ironic subversion of such ideals are depicted with the ritual that turns into a social evil.
Another myth mentioned in Deeti’s recollections is the myth pertaining to Charak, the boat man of the dead and of Jamraj, the god of Death.

None of this was surprising for it was exactly this way that she had expected to be awakened from the flames - afloat in the netherworld, on the Baitarani River in the custody of Charak, the boatman of the dead. Such was her fear of what she would see that she did not open her eyes: every wave she imagined was carrying her closer to the far bank, where the god of death, Jamraj held sway. (Sea 178)

According to myths, the Vaitarna or Baitarani river, as mentioned in the Garuda Purana and other Hindu religious texts, lies between the earth and the infernal Naraka, the realm of Jamraj or Yama, the god of death. It is believed that the journey across this river purifies one of one's sins. Furthermore, while the righteous see it as filled with nectar-like water, the sinful see it as filled with blood. The sinful souls are supposed to cross this river after death. According to the Garuda Purana, this river falls on the path leading to the southern gate of the city of Yama. It is also mentioned that only the sinful souls come via the southern gate. Charak or Charon in Greek myth is the ferryman, who takes the dead to the land of Yama.

In the second novel of Ghosh’s trilogy, River of Smoke, the journey of the schooner Ibis reaches ashore. Here the author opens the oriental world of Chinese civilization. Amitav Ghosh presents in this novel, Paulette’s quest for the golden Camellia, the transformation of Neel as the Munshi of Bahram Modi, Deeti’s diasporic existence through reminiscing legends and the fatal effect of opium leading to Ah Fatt’s pathetic death. Myths are revived through the names, rituals and beliefs that are mentioned in the novel. If Ibis was the ship that transported the first group of indentured labourers across the ocean, the ship that took Seth Bahram and his last
The consignment of opium to China was named Anahita. Ah Fatt recollects the myth connected with this:

What’s the ship’s name then? He said, on a note of challenge, half-hoping that Ah Fatt would not know the answer. The reply came back without a missed breath: ‘Name: *Anahita*. In father’s religion, the name of the goddess of water. Like our A-Ma. Before, had statue in front, of goddess. (*River* 87)

*Anahita* is the Old Persian form of the name of an Iranian goddess and appears in its complete and earlier form as *Aredvi Sura Anahita*; the Avestan language name of an Indo-Iranian cosmological figure venerated as “the divinity of the Waters” and hence associated with fertility, healing and wisdom. The Greek and Roman historians of classical antiquity refer to her either as Anaïtis or as one of the divinities from their own pantheons. She is the ancient Persian Goddess of Fertility, the Goddess of Water, and the Patroness of Women, the Golden Mother and the Warrior Maiden. Her worship originated in Babylon and spread to Ancient Egypt, then to Armenia, Persia and various parts of western Asia. Also known as the Lady of the Lions, or the Lady of the Beasts, she is associated with rivers and lakes, the waters of birth. A-ma is a Chinese sea goddess, known by many names. Her name Mazu means “mother.” She is considered to be a goddess of compassion, one who is willing to intercede on behalf of those in distress. But she is also revered for her courage and her willingness to fight for her principles. Experts believe that Mazu may have originally been a real woman, born around 960 A.D. to a devout Buddhist family that lived on a small island. She became a pupil of an elderly Taoist priest at the age of thirteen. Mazu was also blessed with extraordinary powers and was known to calm storms and rescue sailors in danger.
Seth Bahramji is caught in strife and is portrayed as a victim of destiny. He had to prove his worth, but the downfall of the opium trade ruins him. In the novel that narrates the tale of the opium trade between India and China, it is through Bahram Modi that Ghosh reveals the rituals and beliefs of the Parsi community. Zoroastrian and Persian myths seep in through the rites and the names like “Anahita.” Bahram Modi becomes a battleground for the forces of darkness and light. It is within him that Ahur-Majda and Ahriman fight. In his meeting with Napoleon Bonaparte at St. Helena Island, Napoleon’s first set of questions, Bahram recalls, were of a personal nature:

The scourge of Prussia had declared that he was forcibly impressed by Bahram’s appearance and could see in his face and beard, a resemblance to the Persians of antiquity. In his costume, however, he saw no such similarity, for it seemed to be of the Indian type. He was therefore curious to know what aspects of the civilization of ancient Persia had been preserved by the Parsis of the present day. (River 170)

The position of the Parsi community in a multicultural land like India is portrayed in the novel. Bahram explains to Napoleon how the Indian Parsis in spite of their differences from their Persian counterparts, maintain some of their cultural specificities. The native culture has altered some aspects of their culture, but their faith remains untainted. They have adapted to the ways of the land, except in the matter of wearing two essential articles regarded as important by their faith.

His religion required every adherent, male and female, to wear, next to their skin, a girdle of seventy-two threads called a kasti, and a vestment known as a sadra – and Bahram was wearing both of these, under his outer garments, which were, as the General had rightly surmised, no
different from those which any other man of his country and station would have worn upon such an occasion. *(River 170)*

Bahram Modi explains his faith and the names of the deities in his conversation with the Emperor in exile.

The religion is among the earliest of monotheistic creeds, Your Majesty. The God of its holy book, the Zend-Avesta, is Ahura Mazda, who is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. At the time of Creation Ahura Mazda is said to have unleashed a great avalanche of light. One part of this aura submitted to the Creator and was merged into him; the other part turned away from the light and was banished by Ahura Mazda: this dark force came to be known as ‘angre-minyo’ or Ahriman – the devil, or Satan. Since then the forces of goodness and light have always worked for Ahura Mazda while the forces of darkness have worked against Him. The aim of every Zoroastrian is to embrace the good and to banish evil. *(River 171)*

The celebration of the Parsi festival demonstrates how the diasporic migrants meticulously practice all their rituals. “May Ahriman be smitten and defeated …” *(River 450)*: These words of the priest had an extraordinary effect on him. Bahram Modi’s lament to Zadig, “I gave my soul to Ahriman … and it was all for nothing” *(River 520)*, again focuses on Modi’s inner struggle between the good and the evil as presented in the myth.

Irrespective of religion and beliefs, every culture has its own superstitions and omens that it follows blindly. Shireenbai asks Bahram to postpone his journey due to bad omens. She consults priests and fortune tellers and tries to dissuade Bahram from
going to southern China with his cargo of opium. She has been warned by the priests of the impending troubles.

The night before, if an owl were heard, she would insist upon a change of date; in the morning, she would rearrange the household to make sure that he passed through a carefully constructed labyrinth of auspiciousness – a maid would materialize in the stairwell, with a pot of water on her head; the malis would be dispersed across the garden, as if uninstructed, but with their arms filled with the right sorts of fruits and flowers; when Bahram was about to step into his carriage a fisherman would mysteriously appear, just in time to give him a glimpse of his catch. Shireenbai would even dictate the route to the docks, planning it so as to avoid the washer men at Dhobi-Talao – for a dhobi carrying unclean clothes was a sight to be avoided at all costs. (River 111)

Shireenbai and Bahram were never a happy couple, yet this time alone she was extremely concerned. “It was as if she had at last accepted him as something more than a substitute for the husband she should have had; it was as if, after forty years of performing her marital duties with apathetic punctiliousness, her feelings for him had suddenly ripened into something else” (River 113). On the day of his departure all bad omens appeared together: “An owl was heard at daybreak, a dire augury; and then his turban was found on the floor, having fallen down at night. Worse still, while dressing to accompany Bahram to the docks, Shireenbai had broken her red marriage bangle” (River 113).

The Colver family’s ritualistic visit to Deeti’s shrine gives a mythical stature to the past. In Sea of Poppies Deeti’s visions and drawings in the secrecy of her puja
room expand to historical proportions. The ritualistic reminiscence of the past by the diaspora family becomes a nostalgic retelling of the legends about their roots. “A few more steps and they’d reach the sheltered ledge of rock that formed the shrine’s threshold. This curious natural formation was known to the family as the Chowkey” (River 5). Revisiting the place where memories are treasured as sketches becomes a ritual to the diaspora as represented by Deeti and the family of Colvers.

They would run to the part of the shrine that Deeti called her ‘puja-room’: a small hollow in the rock, hidden away at the back. If the shrine had been an ordinary temple, this would have been its heart – a sanctum with an array of divinities that was centred upon one of the lesser-known deities of the Hindu pantheon: Marut, god of the wind and father of Hanuman. Here, by the light of a flickering lamp, they would perform a quick puja, mumbling their mantras and whispering their prayers. Then, after offering up handfuls of arati flowers and swallowing mouthfuls of tooth-tingling prasad, the children would scamper back to the Chowkey, to be met with cries of: Ātab! Ātab! – even though there was never a table to eat off, but only banana leaves, no chairs to sit on, but only sheets and mats. (River 8)

The order of actions was meticulously practiced and Deeti’s shrine attains ritualistic value. “As with all pilgrimages, the Family visits to the shrine followed certain prescribed patterns: usage and custom dictated the direction of the circumambulation as well as the order in which the pictures had to be viewed and venerated” (River 13).

“The saga of the patriarch’s deliverance from the Ibis was often told amongst the Colvers: it was to them what the story of the watchful geese was to Ancient Rome – an instance when Fate had conspired with Nature to give them a sign that theirs was
no ordinary destiny” (River 13). Here a tale related to ancient Rome is recalled. Long time ago Romans used to domesticate geese. In the middle of the night, an army of Goths approached the city. Although the city’s guards did not hear the sounds of the advancing enemy, the geese did, and they began to make noise. The geese made so much noise that they alerted the guards in time for the soldiers and citizens to make an effective defence of their city and keep it from being overrun. Akin to this tale, the deliverance from the Ibis in the storm becomes the legend of the Colvers.

Rohinton Mistry tries to revive the myths and legends of the Parsi culture. His novels become a return to the mythical roots as they unravel the several myths and legends retold in them. Take, for example, the reference to the myth of Tiresias in Tales from Firozshah Baag. Tiresias is a character from Greek mythology, who had lived both as a man and a woman. Tiresias was the son of Everes and the nymph Chariclo; he was a blind prophet, the most famous soothsayer of ancient Greece. There are many myths and legends associated with his blindness. The most famous account of the origin of his blindness and his prophetic talent is as follows. When Tiresias was walking in the woods one day, he came upon two serpents copulating; he struck them with his staff, and was thereupon transformed into a woman. Seven years later, Tiresias passed by the same place and came upon the same two serpents copulating; he struck them again with the staff and was turned back into a man. Later, Zeus and Hera were arguing over the question of who derived more pleasure from sex, the man or the woman: Zeus said it was the woman, while Hera claimed men got more pleasure from the act. To settle the argument, they consulted Tiresias, since he had experienced life as both sexes, and Tiresias sided with Zeus. In her anger, Hera struck Tiresias blind. Since Zeus could not undo the act of another deity, he gave Tiresias the gift of prophecy in compensation. Another account says that Tiresias
accidentally saw Athena naked, and she covered his eyes with her hands, thus rendering him blind. When Tiresias' mother Chariclo asked Athena to restore her son's sight, the goddess could not undo her own action but gave him the gift of prophecy as compensation. Tiresias represents the dilemma of belonging neither here nor there. The Parsi rituals and faith, and the attempts they make at preserving their ethnic identity through their rituals are important themes in this collection of stories by Mistry.

The title of the novel Such a Long Journey refers to the Parsi legend of long migrations. For Mistry, the trials of immigration are Janus-faced, as he puts it, “looking forward and yearning backward” (Journey 258). Janus is the Roman god of gates and doors, beginnings and endings, and hence represented with a double-faced head, each looking in opposite directions. He was worshipped at the beginning of the harvest time, and at marriage, birth, and other types of beginning, especially at the beginning of important events in a person's life. Janus also represents the transition between primitive life and civilization, between the countryside and the city, between peace and war, and between the stages of the growing-up of young people.

The novel begins with epigraphs from Firdausi's Shah-Nama, T.S Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi” and Rabindranath Tagore’s Gitanjali. Shah-Nama, the Book of Kings, is an epic composed around 1010 CE by the Iranian poet Hakim Abul-Qasim Mansur later known as Ferdousi Tusi. The epic chronicles the legends and histories of the Iranian Aryan kings from primordial times to the Arab conquest of Iran in the 7th century CE. This is done in three successive stages: the mythical, the heroic or legendary, and the historic. In Such a Long Journey, likewise, the history of India is narrated from a diasporic writer’s perspective through myths, legends and history. The epigraph from T. S. Eliot's “Journey of the Magi” is mentioned as the inspiration
for the novel’s title. “The Journey of the Magi” tells the journey of the Three Wise Men appearing in the Gospel of Saint Matthew. They came from the East to visit the new-born infant Jesus. Scholars consider the Magi to have been from Persia and to be the followers of Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion that survives today through the religious practices of the small Zoroastrian communities in Iran and the Parsi and Irani communities in India. Mistry has also quoted from Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* (1930) to give the message that it is the past that gives way to a better future.

The story begins with its Parsi protagonist doing morning prayers:

The clatter and chatter around the milkman seemed remote to Gustad Noble while he softly murmured his prayers under the neem tree, his handsome white-clad figure favoured by the morning light. He recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the kusti from around his waist. When he had unwound all nine feet of its slim, sacred, hand-woven length, he cracked it, whip-like: once, twice, thrice. And thus was Ahriman, the evil one, driven away—with that expert flip of the wrist, possessed only by those who performed their kusti regularly.

(*Journey 4*)

The legend of Ahriman, the evil spirit of Zoroastrians, is presented here as Gustad Noble performs his Kusti:

This part of the prayers Gustad enjoyed most, even as a child, when he used to imagine himself a mighty hunter plunging fearlessly into unexplored jungles, deep in uncharted lands, armed with nothing except his powerfully holy kusti. Lashing that sacred cord through the air, he would slice off the heads of behemoths, disembowel sabre-toothed tigers, lay waste to savage cannibal armies. (*Journey 4*)
There is also a reference to St. George, another dragon slayer that he had come across in a book that belonged to another faith “From then on, whenever he said his prayers, Gustad was a Parsi Saint George, cleaving dragons with his trusty kusti” (Journey 4).

Such a Long Journey retells a political controversy that had a great impact on the history of modern India. It also opens up before the reader the world of Parsi rituals and Zoroastrian faith. Gustad’s recollections recount the tales that he had heard as a young boy. Though the Parsis ritualistically follow their religious practices, they are also secular minded and have no aversion to other faiths. For example, Gustad is described as getting acquainted with the Christian faith through his friend Malcolm:

Christianity came to India over nineteen hundred years ago, when Apostle Thomas landed on the Malabar Coast amongst fishermen, said Malcolm. ‘Long before you Parsis came in the seventh century from Persia,’ he teased, ‘running away from the Muslims.’ ‘That may be,’ rejoined Gustad, ‘but our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your Son of God was even born; a thousand years before the Buddha; two hundred years before Moses. And do you know how much Zoroastrianism influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?’ (Journey 24)

Every community has its myths and legends on which the faith is built. Malcolm narrates the legends of Saint Thomas to Gustad during their Sunday visits to Crawford Market. Malcolm narrates how Saint Thomas was approached by Brahmans and sadhus to know who he was and what his purpose was at the seashore in Malabar. Saint Thomas made them cup their palms, take some water and fling it up into the sky. When they did that, the saint asked them if their gods could keep the water from
falling back, but he was ridiculed. The saint challenged them to forsake pagan deities and trust in his God if he proved otherwise.

Saint Thomas briskly waded out a few feet, cupped his hands, and flung sea-water to the sky. And, lo and behold, it stayed suspended in the air: all of it: the tiny droplets, the big drops, the elongated ones and the round ones, all stood suspended, and refracted the sunlight and sparkled most wondrously, with the perfect glory of the Lord God who created all things. And the crowds gathered on the beach: the fisher folk, foreign tourists, pilgrims, diplomats, committee chairmen, bankers, mendicants, scally-wags, lazy idle loafers, vagabonds, along with the Hindu holy men, all fell promptly to their knees and asked Saint Thomas to tell them more about his God so they too could worship Him. (Journey 25)

There are references to festivals like Nagapanchami when snakes are worshipped, implying the rites and rituals of other communities. Nagapanchami is celebrated in honour of the snake god Shesha Nag. People worship snakes by offering milk and puja. Snakes have been worshipped since the Vedic times and are regarded as protectors of crops from rats and other rodents. Mistry also provides descriptions of practices like black magic. Miss Kutpitia who volunteers to help Dilnavaaz “claimed to know about curses and spells: both to cast and remove; about magic: black and white; about omens and auguries; about dreams and their interpretation” (Journey 4).

There is also a reference to the biblical myth of Cain and Abel to show the loss of trust between siblings. “My own father’s case. His drunken, gambling brother, who destroyed him as surely as crushing his skull. And Jimmy, another kind of Cain” (Journey 178). Another mythical reference is to the story of Absalom, son of David.
Absalom was a great favourite of his father and of the people as well. The book of Samuel describes him as the most handsome man in the kingdom. Absalom eventually rebelled against his father and was killed during the Battle of Ephraim Wood.

The picture on the walls of the Khodadad building re-presents a secular approach, and also shows how religion could influence the mob. The wall that was filthy and was hardly noticed gets a total facelift with the painting of religious pictures on it. There was a ‘Big Morcha’ when it was destroyed.

Over the next few days, the wall filled up with gods, prophets and saints. When Gustad checked the air each morning and evening, he found it free of malodour. Mosquitoes and flies were no longer quite the nuisance they used to be; with their breeding grounds drying up, the numbers diminished dramatically. The holy countenances on the wall—some grim and vengeful, some jovial, some compassionate, others frightful and awe-inspiring, yet others kind and avuncular—watched over the road, the traffic, the passers-by, day and night. Nataraja did his cosmic dance, Abraham lifted his axe high above Isaac, Mary cradled the Infant Jesus, Laxmi dispensed wealth, Saraswati spread wisdom and learning. (Journey 184)

Gustad faces the death of three of his close associates, Dinshawji, Jimmy Billimoria and Tehmul. The funeral rites of Dinshawji show how the Parsis cling on to their myths and rituals to preserve their ethnic identity.

In his white dugli and maroon prayer cap the boy-man blended with the congregation, except at the moment when the dustoorjis gave the cue for the ritual of the dog. The Doongerwadi dog was led to the bier,
the *char-chassam* dog, who, with his preternatural eyes, would contain
the *nassoo*, the evil of death, and assist the forces of good.

(*Journey 251*)

Ornzud is another name of Ahura Mazda, the good spirit. The words of the
women folk trying to console Alamai refer to more superstitious beliefs. It was
believed that the crying of the dear ones makes the dead soul’s passage to the Other
World difficult. Yet another superstition was that if the dear ones of the dead person
cry, then the dead body would become heavier. Mistry also points out how rituals and
customs could possibly lead to evil social practices.

The sunlight streaming into the prayer hall was blocked by four
shadows. The *nassasalers* had arrived. They stood in the doorway,
waiting to carry the bier to the Tower, to the well of vultures. Silly
custom, to have professional pallbearers. And on top of that, poor
fellows treated like outcasts and untouchables. The *sezdoe* ended. The
*nassasalers* entered, clad in white from head to toe. They wore white
gloves and white canvas shoes. People moved aside to give them a
wide berth, fearful of contact. (*Journey 252*)

The discrimination against women in religious practices is suggested in the reference
to the women folk who were not permitted to the well of vultures. They lined up on
the *bungalee’s* verandah. The rites differed in the case of an outcaste like Tehmul.

At Tehmul’s death, Gustad “recites the *Yatha Ahu Varyo* five times and *Ashem
Vahoo* three times, his bloodstained hand resting light as a leaf on Tehmul’s head”
(*Journey 337*). In the long history of Zoroastrianism, the prayer of *Ahuna Varyo* has
been regarded as something of a talisman, a very potent charm capable of producing
extraordinary effects. *Ashem Vahoo* is again another important prayer in
Zoroastrianism. Ashem Vahoo after the Ahuna Varyo is considered one of the basic and powerful mantras in the religion. The repeated chanting brings in peace and calmness. Gustad Noble recites: “Yatha Ahu Varyo and Ashem Vahoo, and the salt water of his eyes, as much for himself as for Tehmul. As much for Tehmul as for Jimmy. And for Dinshawji, for Pappa and Mamma, for Grandpa and Grandma, all who had had to wait for so long” (Journey 337).

As noted above, Rohinton Mistry’s novels focus on the Parsi traditions and rituals. A Fine Balance, even as it retells the story of the Emergency period, focuses on the Parsi faith and rituals through the story of Dina Dalal. The Parsi rituals and prayers at the fire temple are cited as the story of the Shroff family is narrated. There is a reference to the Shahanshahi calendar. The religious calendar is a matter of some controversy among Zoroastrians. There are currently three main calendars in use: Fasli, Shahanshahi, and Qadimi. The caste system in Indian villages is depicted through the story of Ishwar and Ompakash. Kaliyuga is the image used to depict the plight of the nation during the Emergency. Kaliyuga is the age of the demon Kali, the age of vice. It is the last of the four stages the world goes through, as part of the cycle of yugas described in Indian scriptures. The other ages are Satyayuga, Tretayuga and Dvaparayuga.

In Family Matters Mistry speaks of the condition of the elite ethnic minority in a changing world. The novel traces not only the last days of Mr. Kapur, the hapless shopkeeper, but also the life and death of Nariman Vakeel. Shakespeare’s tragedy King Lear is often quoted by Nariman who is a retired professor of English. As he laments to his grandson Jehangir: “To so many classes I taught Lear, learning nothing myself. What kind of teacher is that, as foolish at the end of his life as at the
beginning?” (Family 190) He tells to Jehangir that “Lear is the name of a king who made many mistakes” (Family 190).

The myth of king Sisyphus is mentioned in this context. He was the mythical founder of Corinth. He was a cunning trickster, known for his abilities to deceive gods and humans alike. He was also known as a murderer in his own kingdom, as he would often entertain himself by killing the travellers to his city. Sisyphus had reported to Asopus that Zeus had abducted his daughter, the nymph Aegina. Zeus hence condemned Sisyphus to Tartarus, the deepest, darkest reality beneath the Underworld. There he fooled Thanatos, the demon responsible for death. Sisyphus asked Thanatos to try out his chains to show him how they worked, and when he did, Sisyphus secured him in place. The consequence of the imprisonment of Thanatos was that mortals could no longer die. This obviously upset the normal order of things, and especially Ares, god of war, who could not enjoy his battles when the men he defeated did not die. Ares intervened and released Thanatos. Sisyphus was deemed guilty of hubris in his belief that he could outsmart the gods, and that he had betrayed Zeus’ secret as if it were his place to be involved in the affairs of a god. As punishment, he was condemned to spend eternity rolling a boulder up a hill. Each time the boulder would near the summit, it would roll back down to the bottom. Sisyphus would then be forced to repeat his task.

Through the character of old Nariman who passes on his wisdom to his grandchildren, Mistry narrates the legends and tales of the Parsi community. Roxana tells his sons about how and why Parsis don’t kill spiders, and they only eat the female chicken, never a cock. Nariman says:

Well, a very long time ago, thousands of years ago, there lived an evil king whose name was Zuhaak. Out of Zuhaak’s shoulders grew two
immense serpents, ugly and smelly, that had to be fed every morning with the brains of two young men. For more than nine hundred years Zuhaak ruled, and brought indescribable misery upon the people, devouring their sons day after day. The people prayed for deliverance; the centuries passed; and finally, the great hero Faridoon arrived to confront Zuhaak. This evil monster had murdered Faridoon’s father, and Faridoon was seeking vengeance. They met in hand-to-hand combat. It was a terrible fight, a fight that lasted days and weeks. Sometimes it seemed Faridoon was winning, sometimes Zuhaak. But in the end Faridoon overpowered him and tied him in huge chains.

(Family 167)

The holy book of Shah-Nama and the stories in it are recollected in the novel. One of these stories pertains to King Jamshid who first ushered in a glorious age in Persian history. He became increasingly arrogant with his achievements which led to Iran’s downfall. Jamshid went into hiding for a hundred years. When he reappeared on the shores of the Sea of China, he was killed by the demon-king Zuhaak. Another legend that is recollected is that of Rustam and Sohrab. It is a tragic story in which, without recognizing each other, the father and the son fight until the father kills the son; Rustom kills Sohrab. The legend of the miracle of Zarathustra healing King Gustasp’s favourite horse, Aspe-Siha, is also retold in the novel. The horse was inflicted by an unusual illness. The legs of the horse were embedded in its stomach. None of the royal veterinarians could treat it. Zarathustra who was in prison then, conveyed to his prison guard that he would be able to heal the horse. The King immediately summoned Zarathustra who told him that if the horse was healed, the King would have to become a devotee of Ahura Mazda. As soon as the King agreed
to his conditions, Zarathushtra cured the horse of its illness. The King realised his folly and recognised Zarathushtra as the true Prophet and messenger of Ahura Mazda and gave him a place next to his throne. The entire royal family and all the Iranians now accepted Zarathushtra as the Prophet.

Myths are integrated with history in the novels of Shashi Tharoor also. The Great Indian Novel is built on the framework of the great epic The Mahabharata. Here myths are recreated with the names of political leaders taking the place of legendary heroes. Just as the Mahabharata has 18 parvas, each describing a particular event, Tharoor’s novel has 18 chapters, each providing a contemporary recreation of the events in the epic.

According to Hindu mythology, Maharshi Ved Vyasa was the son of the great sage Parashar. Vyasa says: “I was born with the century, a bastard, but a bastard in a fine tradition, the offspring of a fisherwoman seduced by a travelling sage” (Great 19). According to the mythical story of the Mahabharata, Sage Parashar is smitten by the incredible beauty of the fisherwoman Satyavati and wants her to accompany him. He requests her father to let Satyavati accompany him. After Ved Vyas is born and taken away from his mother, Satyavati returns home.

It was Ved Vyas who gave to the world the epic of the Mahabharata. Lord Ganapathi was his scribe. The first section of the Mahabharata starts with Lord Ganesha writing the text of the epic while Vyasa dictates it to him. Ganesha agrees to write the epic under the pre-condition that sage Vyasa would never pause while dictating. Vyasa agrees to the condition with his own demand that Ganesha should also take time to understand the things before writing it down.

Bhishma, also known as Devavrata or Gangadatta, is a legendary character in the Mahabharata. In Tharoor’s novel, Gandhiji takes the role of this legendary hero,
who according to the myth, is the son of King Shantanu and the holy Ganga. The story this time is that when King Shantanu goes hunting, he sees Satyavati, and asks her father, who is the chief of the fisherfolk, for her hand. Her father refuses to consent to the marriage until Shantanu promises to make any future son of Satyavati the king upon his death. According to Rajagopalachari:

Devavrata vowed with upraised arm to the father of the maiden ‘I shall never marry and I dedicate myself to a life of unbroken chastity.’ And as he uttered these words of renunciation the gods showered flowers on his head, and cries of ‘Bhishma,’ ‘Bhishma’ resounded in the air. ‘Bhishma’ means one who undertakes a terrible vow and fulfils it. That name became the celebrated epithet of Devavrata from that time. (9)

Tharoor gives a parody of Devavrata’s vow of lifelong celibacy to guarantee his father’s promise. King Shantanu says:

That was a fine thing to do, my son, a far, far better thing than I could ever have done. I don’t know about this celibacy stuff, but I’m sure it’ll do you a lot of good in the long run. I’ll tell you something my son: I’ve simply no doubt at all that it’ll give you longevity. You will not die unless and until you really want to die. (Great 24)

Tharoor retells the myths regarding the birth of Dritarashtra, Pandu and Vidhur, Pandu’s marriage to Kunti and Madri, Dritarashtra’s marriage to Gandhari, the birth of their sons the Kauravas and the Pandavas, their rivalry, Pandava’s marriage to Draupadi, and the events that lead to the Kurukshetra war. Tharoor ridicules, exaggerates and alters the myths as they are retold. Prince Pandu, who accidentally kills sage Kindama mistaking him for a deer in a jungle, is cursed with
death if he ever engages in a sexual act. This is twisted in Tharoor’s retelling of the myth where Pandu dies of a massive cardiac arrest.

The myths about Ekalavya and Karna are also altered in the narrative of Tharoor’s novel. In the original text, Ekalavya learns his archery lessons from Guru Drona without the knowledge of the Guru. When Ekalavya excels in his field and emerges as a threat to Arjun, Drona’s favourite student, Guru Drona asks for the right thumb of Ekalavya as his fee for the training of the tribal boy. The poor boy cuts his thumb and presents it to Guru Drona. But in Tharoor’s novel, Ekalavya refuses to cut his thumb and offer it to his teacher. “Ekalavya stands his ground, but swallows, his dark face burning darker in his dismay. ‘I... I’m sorry, sir, but I cannot destroy my life and my mother’s to pay your fee,’ he says faintly and firmly. . . The boy steps back, looks wildly around him and trips hastily out of the room” (Great 199). The myths regarding the revenge of Amba reborn as Shikandin, the death of Krishna, the Pandava’s renunciation of the kingdom and Yudishtra’s ascension to heaven are also narrated in the political satire.

In the second novel, Show Business, the illusionary world of Bollywood cinema is presented as a world of myths, where the onscreen heroes are idolized. Tharoor portrays the myth of superstardom and ridicules the idolization of politicians and celebrities. The myth of Kalki is mentioned in the novel. Kalki is the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu, believed to take birth in the Kaliyuga. Popular images depict him as Devadatta or God given, riding a white horse with wings. In these images, Kalki is brandishing a brilliant sword in his left hand, eradicating the decadence of Kaliyuga. Lord Kalki will remove the darkness of Kaliyuga and establish a new yuga called Satyayuga on the earth. The movie Kalki is supposed to be the hero Banjara's comeback film with which he hopes to restore his fortunes. Banjara's accident on the
sets of this movie turns ironical. For instead of the return to stardom he ends up in a coma.

The novel *Riot*, based on the history of the communal riots that followed the Ayodhya issue, revives the legends of Ram and Sita. The myth of Ram and Sita is narrated by Ram Charan Gupta and Priscilla Hart from two different perspectives. Priscilla writes to her friend Cindy about this mythical story and gives a new perspective on it.

Learned something interesting about the Hindu god, Ram the one all fuss is about these days. Seems that when he brought his wife back from Lanka and became king, the gossips in the kingdom were whispering that after so many months in Ravan’s captivity, she could not possibly be chaste anymore. So to stop the tongues wagging, he subjugated her to agni-pariksha, a public ordeal by fire, to prove her innocent. She walked through unscathed. A certified pure woman. That stopped the gossip for a while, but before long the old rumours surfaced again. It was beginning to affect Ram’s credibility as king. So, he spoke to her about it. What could she do? She willed the earth to open up, literally and swallowed her. That was the end of the gossip. Ram lost the woman he had warred to win back, but he ruled on as a wise and beloved king. *(Riot 63)*

Ramcharan Gupta in his interview with Randy Diggs narrates the myth from another perspective.

Do you know about our God Ram, the hero of Ramayana? He was a great hero. A king. But because of a scheming stepmother, he suffered banishment in the forest for fourteen years. Such injustice. But Ram
bore it nobly. While he was in the forest his wife Sita was kidnapped by the demon Ravana and taken to Lanka. But Ram with his brother Lakshman and with the help of a monkey army led by God Hanuman, invaded Lanka defeated the demon, and brought his wife back. A great hero. (Riot 52)

The District Magistrate Lakshman narrates the tale about the Kotli to Priscilla. “The story of Kotli was that the owner of Kotli was murdered in his bed by his wife and her lover. But he never let them enjoy the fruits of the villainy. He haunted the house” (Riot 47). The legend of Ghaziya Miyan is narrated by the Muslim scholar Mohammed Sarwar:

Ghaziya Miyan, according to popular belief was a great Muslim warrior who was killed on the field of battle in A.D.1034 fighting a bunch of Hindus not far from here, a bit to the north at Bahaich. Soon after his death he was canonized in popular memory; people began gathering at his tomb regularly, ballads of his exploits were composed in both Awadhi and Bhojpuri languages. (Riot 65)

He becomes a legend to state the secular attitude of the Hindus and the Muslims. In one of the legends, Krishna’s foster mother Jasodha makes a dramatic entry into the wedding celebration of Ghaziya Miyan, and pleads with him to save the cows that are being slaughtered by Raja Sohal Deo. Tharoor has presented the possibility of having different approaches to a story in this novel that deals with the history of communal riots in India.

The three writers Ghosh, Mistry and Tharoor revive and retell myths in their search for the self. This is a return to the past, which becomes a way of retelling history through myths, tales and legends. The oral tradition of preserving the past in
stories and legends is revived and is used as a means to return to the past. This return to the mythical roots also problematizes the act of writing history.