INTRODUCTION

Myth criticism requires the critic to account for the literary development of myth. After the poet uses myth for his creative purposes, the critic's job is to observe how myth germinated into what the artist has created. - Harold P. Simonson.

The study of literature has taken a new turn with the introduction of analysis of literary works on the basis of the myths used by the writer categorizing certain works into a new genre. In modern scholarship, both comparative and general, the widely discussed subject is the relationship between myth and literature. Although Myth criticism is a new angle of analysis, the relationship between myth and fine arts is an ancient one. Artists, especially poets have drawn from myth as a source for inspiration from time immemorial.

The explanations of myth in psychological terms in the modern times, has made it even more suitable to the themes, which interest the poets. Freud, Jung, Bodkin, Trilling, Lesser are among the myriad who add to the abundance of explanations that analyse mythological motives psychologically. This analysis has led to the unconscious and sometimes conscious assimilation of psychoanalytical data in the works of literature. This use of mythological elements in literary works has led to the study of myth by innumerable scholars. The study of mythological elements woven into a work of literature invariably begins with an explanation of the multi-dimensional concept 'Myth' and the various definitions available tend to bog down a scholar attempting a

definition of myth. The definition of Richard Chase comes to the aid of the scholar:

Myth is an aesthetic device for bringing the imaginary but powerful world of preternatural forces into a manageable collaboration with the objective (i.e., experienced) facts of life in such a way as to excite a sense of reality amenable to both the unconscious passions and the conscious mind.  

Thus, one finds that mythic writing is an urge from within the poet himself to link himself to the past. The origin of myths began with the primitive man’s bewilderment at the natural forces intimidating him, like the fear of the dark, biting animals, hurricanes, flood, lightening and his unsheltered exposure to these dangerous environmental forces. The primitive man, along with his fear of cowering from these forces also had his share of experience in participation and reciprocation which brought him pleasure like daylight, abundance of fruits, roots, shower of rains and sense of promise of security from these forces. The primitive man, thus, connected all life threatening forces, with darkness and life promising forces with light. Mark Schorer’s definition puts it in a nutshell:

Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend.  

These experiences for the primitive man were real, but the modern poet takes them as symbolic or metaphorical expressions. The myths record the primitive man's observation of the cyclic nature of natural occurrences, thus giving them a transcendental value. The modern poet, therefore, takes refuge in myth, as an escape from his contemporary world, of ideologies, which proffer no answers to his fears and frustrations. As Rainer Emig points out:

What gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely politics. 4

The passage of time, and development of science, has provided man with enough knowledge and control of natural forces, through shelters contrived to provide protection. These protective measures have led to the distancing of man from real nature. It has also resulted in man's vanity in his power. The immediacy of myth is experienced only by the poetic vision endowed with psychic attributes. This vision, indulges in the process of linking, the contemporary situation to the mythic one and vice versa. This awakening of mythic consciousness is, triggered off by certain dreams, fantasies, objects etc. for eg., father, mother, god, food, etc. Even emotional situations like idyllic environment, harrowing environment and external incidents like

murder, copulation, death, rivalry etc. The most significant are those, which deal with sinful or incestual desires and the fear of retaliation or punishment for the same. The modern man living in the so-called civilized society is not much different from the primitive as far as his basic instincts are concerned. The suppression of these urges, in the name of decency, frustrates the real self, which contains the residue of the primitive. It tends to go back to its familiar surroundings. The basic tension found, in the natural forces was given masculine and feminine attributes by the primitive man and this urge of union has remained the same, although curbed gradually through Totems, Taboos and later through religion and laws. This restriction has taken diverse forms, in which the most important is the suppression of the feminine powers. The modern world built on intellect has tended to undermine the natural creative energy found in the women, i.e. of childbearing, love and emotion.

Education and the scientific knowledge has alienated man from his real surroundings. This alienation has led to one of the major pre-occupations of the modern-age, that being the search for the real-self in relation to the universe. This search has taken diffuse and tortuous forms. The scientific spirit of enquiry has trespassed into realms of everything one believed to be sacred and divine. The modern scientific approach has devalued all aspects of man's life, which lack utilitarian value. The belief that the exploitation of all natural resources as necessary, for man's progress has shocked the sensitive minds, which foresee the destruction of human emotions, along with the very sources upon which rest the survival of mankind. The modern man no...
living according to Joseph Campbell, in "a mythologically instructed community" has nowhere to turn to and consequently gropes around for an anchor. Religion has failed to offer an explanation, to the monstrosities in the name of progress, and writers turn to the past in search of explanations for the unjustified sufferings of the age. The myths once devalued, as superstitions by science offer consolation by informing that the suffering of similar type has taken place before, and that it is transitory.

Literature makes an attempt to convey the confusions of man’s mind in the form of writing. The connection between poetry as a form of writing and myth as a source of inspiration has existed from time immemorial. The Bards sang about the myths, which got transformed into Ballads and Epics through writing. Poetry has forever drawn from myth to nourish it and give it deeper significance. The poet uses the myth as a framework, onto which he can transfer his personal experiences to give them a universal outlook.

The modern poet is left with no choice, but to create his own myth or turn to the past in search of myths that suit his predicament. The myths selected, are influenced by the poet’s socio-cultural and religious background. The poets turn to myths, which offer an explanation to their bewilderment caused by the chaotic situations around them.

The two poets taken up for study are Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. The two poets come from entirely different backgrounds, but have faced similar situations in their lives as women. Both Sylvia Plath and

Kamala Das have adopted the confessional mode of writing to speak out the grievances ordained by their gender roles. Yet, the two poets transcend the genre of confessional writing by the use of myths in their poems. The two poets have been compared, as women writers taking recourse to myth in search of explanations for their unjustified suffering. Their grief and wrath at the war crazed world, which makes it impossible for them to fulfill even the biologically ordained role of giving birth to children and hoping for their bright future is highlighted in their poems. The growing awareness of the masculine intellect suppressing the feminine emotions and intuition becomes the major preoccupation of these two poets. The tension between the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ and a desire for its resolution is seen in the poets.

The study aims at discovering the myths selected by the two poets in their poems to resolve the tension between the masculine and feminine forces.

Judith Kroll has done an extensive and elaborate study on the influence of ‘The White Goddess Myth’ of Robert Graves in the poems of Sylvia Plath. Bernetta Quinn has worked extensively on the “Medusan Imagery in Sylvia Plath” in the poems of Sylvia Plath.

The mythological elements in Kamala Das have been worked upon by M.L. Sharma, with an attempt to highlight the influence of the Radha-Krishna myth in her poems. The two poets, Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have here before been taken up for study individually. Yet, the two poets have not been taken up for a comparative study of the mythological elements in their poetry. This study makes a pioneering attempt at comparing not only the mythological elements woven into...
their poems, but also highlights the influence of socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of these two poets which led to the selection of the respective myths. It also emphasizes the influence of the myths used in their life and work.

Chapter I introduces the concept of myth. The chapter continues to highlight the factors that led to the origin of myth and the primitive man's need for myth and its usefulness to him. The various definitions of myth are quoted to emphasize its multi-faceted influence on man's life. Myth is studied in relation to man's encounter with the forces of the nature, which threatened his very existence. Adopting a linear progression, myth is studied in relation to magic, religion, language and finally literature. The role of myth in the life of the primitive man is compared with the role of myth, in the life of the modern man. The use of myth in literature for universalization of personal experiences with the help of 'metaphors', 'symbols' and 'archetypes' is studied. The influence of myths, both on the conscious and unconscious level is analysed along with the influence of Jung and the Freud. The dependence of myths on the interpreters is also taken up for study.

Chapter II deals exclusively with the American poet Sylvia Plath. It begins with a brief biographical sketch and continues to analyze in general all her published works. The volumes of verses The Colossus, The Ariel, The Channel Crossing and Winter Trees are mentioned along with their dominant features of landscape and topics selected. The Bell Jar her autobiographical work, her letters to her mother Letters Home, The Journals and her short stories are an
The attempt made is at a comprehensive approach of the poet as a whole. The remarks of her mother Aurelia Plath and husband Ted Hughes are cited to authenticate the influences in her work. Sylvia Plath's remarks are cited to highlight her honesty, in acknowledging the influences, which motivated her into writing some of the important poems.

The influence of Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton are traced, along with the influence of Jung, Frazer and Freud and Mann. The influence of Robert Graves is seen in the main myth adopted by her in her poems.

Sylvia Plath makes use of five myths in her poems. The first is the myth of 'Oedipus', where she becomes Electra with incestual desires for her dead father and initiates the beginning of the mythic pattern. The second is the myth of 'Medusa', which is complementary to the first myth where she rejects her mother, and accepts the 'Lunar' muse, the third and the main one is the 'White Goddess' myth which weaves the first two myths into a mythic schema. The fourth is the 'Horatio Alger' myth, which increases the tension in her life between the woman/wife and the poet in her. The fifth one is the myth of 'Nazism' enacted by Hitler. This needs mentioning because her poems abound in Nazi imagery and also because her father was a German and her mother, partly Jewish. The influence of Jung is traced to her reading of the Upanishad and Zen Buddhism.

The chapter progresses from her childhood, tracing the influences in her life, stage by stage, along with the myths used in the respective stages. Finally the conclusion of the chapter is arrived at regarding her use of myth and its influence on her life and works.
Chapter III deals exclusively with Kamala Das the Indian poet, who is supposed to have pioneered the confessional mode of writing in Indian poetry. The chapter begins with a brief sketch of her life history. Her published works Summer in Calcutta, The Descendants, The Old Play House and Other Poems, Collected Poems Volume I, short stories, A Doll for the Child Prostitute and her Autobiographical work, My Story are analyzed broadly to get a picture of the main pre-occupation of her works. The chapter emphasizes the role of Hinduism in her life. Unlike the West, where man's life is categorized into various compartments, in Hinduism all the aspects of a man's life are thought about as contributing to his wholeness and guidance proffered through model characters. The role of the Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, Upanishads, Vedas and Smritis etc. are shown influencing the poet's life. The prominence of the mythological characters and humanization of the divine in the name of 'Avatāras' is described. The role of Hindu joint family, where more than three generations live under one roof and pass on the myths is emphasized.

The chapter continues to analyze her poems, in the light of the myths that Kamala Das has used. A rebellion against the stringent rules and regulations of the tradition is traced in her poems. The wrath against a society which denies freedom to a woman and her subordination to man is the main concern of her poems. Sex as an emotional need of a woman as against man's conception of the same as purely physical is another pre-occupation highlighted in her poems. The tension between the masculine and feminine powers and their resolution is the major pre-occupation of both her prose and verse.
works. The influence of the preachings of Buddha, are located in the poems, especially, those dealing with the divided selves, and use of words.

The main myths used by her are four. The first is the myth of Parasurama, which led to her Dravidian ancestry and the Nayar heritage, which she considers responsible for her dark skin and her desire for sex outside marriage. The second is the Shaiva mythology, which is complementary to her Dravidian ancestry and celebrates the union of the male and the female forces of nature. The third is the myth of Agni (fire) and the last myth is the Radha-Krishna myth, which she uses to reconcile herself to her fate both as a woman and a soul.

The chapter develops from her childhood, tracing the influences in her life, stage, by stage along with the myths used in the respective stages. Finally, the conclusion of the chapter is drawn, recording the myths selected and their influence in her life and works.

Chapter IV attempts a comparison of the two poets, Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. As the comparison involves intra-cultural poets, it takes into consideration their diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, which influenced the selection of the respective myths.

The chapter begins with an introduction of the main themes of the two poets and follows a linear development comparing the lives of the two poets, beginning with their childhood. The relation to their father is highlighted and later their husbands. The words used by the two poets to describe their marriage, and myths influencing their imagery, is traced. The gradual change from the role of a submissive role of a wife to an independent woman full of creative energy and desire for freedom
from male domination forms the schema of comparative study taken up here. Motherhood of the two poets is compared and the contrasting attitudes are recorded. The significant digression in the myths selected to resolve the inherent tension existing within the man-woman relation is emphasized. The influence of Buddhism is also traced in the works of the two poets.

Thus the dissertation has four chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The chapters are organized with a view to identify the socio-cultural and religious background, which led to the selection of the myths by the poets and the influence of the myths in their lives and works.