CHAPTER - I

MYTH AND ITS USE IN LITERATURE

Introduction:

The myth is the foundation of life; it is the timeless schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious. - Thomas Mann.¹

Thomas Mann emphasizes the transcendental and eternal characteristic of myth. Mann refers to myth as an inevitable reference to which a man turns to, when in need of a system to universalize his personal predicament. The two poets taken up for study, Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das, have made use of myths in their poems to universalize their personal experiences. The study aims at the influence of myths in the lives of the two poets and their works. The use of myth by the modern poets has led to a new type of criticism, namely myth criticism. Myth criticism analyses the works of literature based on the myths used by the writers. This unique approach of critical analysis has given rise to a need of understanding the concept ‘Myth’ in relation to man’s life.

“I know very well what it is provided that nobody asks me, but if, I am asked and try to explain I am baffled,”² said St. Augustine when asked to define time.

The predicament of anyone attempting a definition of Myth can be compared to that of St. Augustine's, who was requested to define the concept of Time. Myth is like 'Time', something powerfully experienced yet difficult to put into words. Myth has an intangible omnipresence with a tendency of manifesting itself tangible in man's everyday life in the form of rituals, dreams, customs, religious beliefs etc. It has various facets for various purposes and thus various definitions are made to adopt the given context. A single comprehensive definition of myth cannot even be dreamt of. Each fact is unique and realistic to the point of tangibility to the perceiver who consciously or sub-consciously adopts it or inverts it. One could state that no human being is beyond the influence or beyond the pale of myth. Myth dominates and shapes not only the individual psyche but also the whole cultural aspect of a people. Myth in fact links the people of a community or nation together with a set of symbols. These representative symbols form the archetypes and help in unification of people adopting them. Thus, Myths have not only become the elements of culture but projections of subliminal urges and archetypes. Myth is something whose presence, although acknowledged by man, is not totally comprehensible to him. An intrigue to man, myth proves itself to be double edged, difficult to deny and difficult to define, thus proving itself a challenge to man's rationality as rightly pointed out by Ruthven, "Seemingly immune to rational explanation myths nevertheless stimulate rational inquiry." 3

3. Ibid.
The inexplicable and uncontrollable part of man's mind refuses to accept anything in a docile manner and tends to contract myth in comprehensible terms and words. Man's desire for power and his vanity in his intellect try in vain to explain myth with various backgrounds. The philosopher, the Philologist, the Psychologist, the Atheist, the Anthropologist, the Sociologist and the Linguist all try to explain the concept of Myth. These scholars from different fields attempt an interpretation of Myth focusing their perspective on their respective fields of scholarship, thus giving myth a kaleidoscopic character. A purview of the freely available and accessible definitions of Myth helps us to list the following as being largely accepted by the respective scholars of the mentioned fields.

Frazer's name stands at the pinnacle of interpretation of Myth. With the publication of his The Golden Bough, (1890), Frazer has awakened the world consciousness into a new perspective, which, hitherto was only imagined. Frazer's masterpiece not only influenced Anthropology but also brought about a new approach in literary criticism, which is of immense significance to the students of literature. A work of gigantic scholarship, it is authenticated with loads of illustrative material from anthropology and folklore, highlighting the social and religious significance of the customs of varied people. He has attempted a structural approach emphasizing similarities and parallels in different cultures, thus bringing into limelight the fact that the working of man's mind all over the world in his interaction with the uncanny and the mysterious is similar (spiritus mundi), while the differences are only functional depending upon environmental.
geographical, cyclic divisions of seasons, degree of natural calamities like rain, floods, lightning, earthquakes, fertility of the land and its people etc. Frazer’s name needs mention because Sylvia Plath, the American poet reflects his influence in her works. Malinowski rightly describes Frazer’s work as the “greatest scientific Odyssey in modern humanism.”

According to Frazer there are three ages of man, “an age of magic, an age of religion and an age of science, the last one just beginning.” This definition provides a schema for the study of myth beginning from its origin and its relation to magic, religion and science. Frazer has put an end to the belief that Myth is about primitive and savage people only. The Golden Bough according to Northrope Frye “is not really about what people did in the remote and savage past; it is about what the human imagination does when it tries to express itself about the greatest mysteries, the mysteries of life and death and after life.”

Frazer’s point of view runs parallel to the Vedic point of view. The Vedas are considered the mythological books of the Hindus and Sri Aurobindo says, “They are not the work of rude, barbarous and primitive craftsman, but the living breath of a Supreme and conscious

art, forming its creations in the puisant but well governed movement of a self-observing inspiration."\(^7\)

The phrase ‘Primitive Savage’ with respect to the ancient men who formed the myths needs to be used with caution. The phrase seems highly subjective when one considers the modern world where destruction has become the way of life. If they seem ‘primitive savages’ to the modern mind, the vice-versa too cannot be rejected. The primitive man was the pioneer who recorded encounters with the universe, and he knew that his knowledge was invaluable. It was his intelligence that made him formulate the myths, which are realities, but veiled in allegories and illustrated through symbols. The capacity of man to reach the reality is in proportion to his power of imagination. That, perhaps, is one reason why poets narrate myths, because both are based on imagination. The Vedas, the Upanishads, Aryanakas etc., are excellent examples of stories of myths veiled in allegories and illustrated through symbols. Every elemental force, natural object, natural phenomenon has a story behind it, and these books record them.

Gerald A. Larue speculating on the origin of myth says, “Somewhere in the forgotten past, perhaps of uncanny or mysterious encounters mythic patterns began to emerge as one answer to the need of psychic survival.”\(^8\) The natural forces, which worried the primitive


man, were many—especially, the natural calamities. He needed an explanation for his survival and the experience he gained through his encounters with these forces manifested in the form of myths. These myths became defense mechanisms for his survival. Myths gave meaning to his otherwise meaningless world. Man being a creature of system and organization, had to fit in the unknown and uncontrollable into a slot, which suited his pattern of life and myths helped him by defining his position in the universe in relation to his natural surrounding. In creating an organized surrounding he began to give “Order and structure to the world.”

Survival being the prerogative, for the primitive man, he had to follow and enforce the order discovered through experience. He had to maintain the structure or illusion of security to ensure the continuity of life. Myths helped him in supporting and enforcing the existing social and moral values beneficial for his survival and this was possible only through some kind of mental submission. Malinowski in his definition of myth highlights the above fact that myth to the primitive man “was not just idle rhapsody, not an aimless out pouring of vain imagining but a hard—working extremely important cultural force.”

Myths were realistic to the primitive man, they were not figments of imagination. The primitive man in his earnest desire to express his experiences and beliefs put them in the form of rituals, as Malinowski

puts it, "Myth is a narrative resurrection of primeval reality."  
The myths contain in them the magical or uncanny experience of the 
primitive man. They reveal the hidden meanings to the modern man 
when he starts to interpret them.

When the above mentioned definitions are considered, one could 
safely endorse Francis Ferguson's view that myth represents the 
"deepest wisdom in man." The primitive man though illiterate and 
void of any knowledge, had succeeded in surviving the calamities 
through the use of his reasoning capability.

The definition of Myth in Encyclopedia Britannica gives an almost 
complete definition of myth as having originated for the fulfillment of 
various requirements of the primitive man. At the same time it also 
gives a gist of all the varied available definitions dealing with singular 
aspects of myth. It attempts an understanding of myth with its multi-
dimensional functions as follows:

Myth is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific 
interest but a narrative resurrection of primeval reality told in 
satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social 
submissions, assertions even practical requirements. Myth fulfills 
in primitive culture an indispensable function, it expresses, 
enhances and codifies belief, it safeguards and enforces morality. 
It vouches for the efficiency of rituals and contains practical rules 
for the guidance of man.  

11. Ibid.
12. Francis Ferguson, The Human Image in Dramatic Literature (New 
After discussing the various definitions regarding the origin of myth and its use to the primitive man, one needs to see its social usefulness. Warner's definition with respect to myth and society is as follows:

Myths offer a lens which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context – they can lock us up in stock reactions, bigotry and fear, but they're not immutable, and by unpicking them, the stories can lead to others. Myths convey values and expectations which are always evolving, in the process of being formed, but – and this is fortunate – never set so hard they cannot be changed again.  

This is an indication that the main purpose behind the origin of myth was 'explanation', an explanation flexible enough to adapt any situation even when it arose unexpectedly. Here, one notices the intelligence of primitive savage who, had to lead an actively practical life struggling with a multitude of difficulties, and had to be pragmatic in his outlook. He had to be ever prepared for contingencies in his life, as Malinowski says, “Mythology the sacred lore of the tribe, is as we shall see, a powerful means of assisting primitive man, of allowing him to make the two ends of his cultural patrimony meet.”  

A glance at the above definitions, leads to the conclusion regarding the origin of myth by its usefulness to man in the formation of societies.

Durkheim in *The Consciousness of Myth* points out that "the function of myths is to bind a society, create a structure governed by rules and habits." 16 Mark Schorer defines its comparative basis when he says, "Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life of a primary awareness of man in the Universe, of many configurations upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend." 17 As myths were unconscious responses to external stimuli; they tend to remain as residues in the collective unconscious, forming the very foundation of life. They remain as a strong motivating force in the mainstream consciousness and shape man's reactions to the happenings around him. Therefore, people respond to them even when their scientific knowledge and reason oppose them as irrational and supernatural.

Myths remain as residues in the unconscious not only of the individual but a community or nation, thus shaping their characteristics. Myths are induced with a sense of dynamism, being the integral components of human civilization, helping in creation and maintenance of codes of belief, faith in rituals and tenets of morality exhibited in religious faith, cultural behaviour and social attitudes. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the essence of a society is myth. Any intra-cultural study, or comparative study becomes a comparison of

mythological elements, as myths influence the whole outlook of man depending on his heritage. The Church reinforces religious myths through re-enacting the birth of Christ, his resurrection etc. In Hinduism too, one has the celebration of the birth of Krishna.

**Myth and Magic**

The age of magic mentioned by Frazer begins, when the primitive man comprehended the repetitive order of natural happenings. Through keen observation and perpetual encounter with the natural forces he observed the cause and effect system existing in the universe around him. The primitive man's mind, which had taught him, the art of survival furthered his capacity of survival with the innovation of magic. The age of magic thus became the first stage representing man's intellectual progress. Frazer says, "Just as there has been an Age of Stone on the physical level so on the intellectual side there has everywhere been an age of magic." 18

Frazer has made an extensive study on the types of magic found in the world. Sympathetic Magic, and Homeopathic Magic are found to be the most powerful. Magic came into origin when the primitive man copied the natural phenomena using esoteric words to induce fear in his fellowmen. Although magic has lost its original position in influencing people it has not become extinct. The concept of sympathetic magic has proved itself too strong to be rooted out. Sometimes a piece of the cloth

worn by the person to be destroyed or a lock of his hair is used with the belief that anything that contributes to the whole becomes the whole and is used to harm or destroy the real person. The simple explanation being that if the image suffers, so will the man. Adopting the rule of magician, Sylvia Plath one of the poets being studied here rejected the religion, which failed her. Sylvia Plath destroyed herself in order to destroy her husband as she considered him to be her counter-part influenced by Frazer's concept of sympathetic magic. Sylvia’s method is hardly shocking, when it is a common sight in today’s so called world of science, to see effigies of people burnt to show wrath against an evil or unwanted person. The magic hidden in the innermost psyche of man erupts sometimes in extremely absurd manners. The destruction of evil by making images of these deities, who cause sufferings, too is not unfamiliar even in today’s society both in the West and the East. It only emphasizes the fact that, the primitive nature of man has not been completely erased. It lays submerged to erupt with extraordinary force at the most unpredictable time, in the most unpredictable manner.

**Myth and Religion**

The transition from myth to religion was both natural and inevitable. The religious priests converted the magical power into religion. The powers were attributed to God. As priests were the mediators between God and man, they became sort of demi-gods, wielding great power in the society.
Through religion the myths are enforced in society, instilling a sense of fear regarding social behaviour. Jung has defined religion as "a peculiar attitude of the mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word 'religia', which means a careful consideration and observations of certain dynamic factors that are conceived as 'Powers,' 'Spirits,' 'Dreams,' 'Gods,' 'Laws,' 'Ideals' or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration or ground, beautiful and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshipped and loved." 19 Jung describes man's tendency of recognizing the forces, powers and concept outside him and categorizing them into protective and dangerous.

Frazer, religion has two elements a theoretical element and a practical element namely, a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate them. Belief stands on a higher plane, as it comes first, as only belief or faith in a superior being leads to propitiation of the same. Thus faith leads to practice, which becomes religion. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone," 20 says St. James. Action through love or fear of God becomes religion. Yet, there lay a stark difference between religious beliefs and rituals. Religion need not necessarily manifest itself in rituals. The main aim of religion is

propitiation of deity. It can be done through charity, mercy, purity and not necessarily through prayers and sacrifices. This idea illustrated in Frazer is very close to the Hindu and Christian philosophy of religion where the divine can be pleased through service of the poor, honesty, simple living and noble thinking etc. Religious myths in order to motivate man into performing right action created the concept of paradise, heaven and hell. The myths all over the world have represented paradise. The mind torn between magic and religion was promised respite through the concept of paradise, described in glorious terms. A promise of peace and harmony, where, fear and anxiety did not exist. Myths of paradise show the proximity of the primitive man with nature. The belief existed that one could reach heaven by climbing a tree. It was a state of bliss and was destroyed by the fall of Adam. The relationship between man and God was mutual, Gods came down and human beings went up. Religion made use of God, heaven and hell to ensure conformity through promise of eternal bliss and fear of eternal suffering. Heaven was made attractive through promise of freedom from mortal suffering. Hell was made frightening through images of terrible punishments. Even with the help of myths, religion could do nothing about the mortal body.

Just as myths created religion, religion has created myths. The Hindu, the Greek, the Islamic, the Chinese, the Christian religions have a whole number of myths woven around them to reinforce existing faiths.
The outcome of the necessity of the life after death led the humanising of mythological characters, which are found worthy of worshipful position in religion. Heroes were deified and Gods were humanized. Ghost and ancestor worship and archetypal concepts with 'numinous quality' have been the manifestation of this religious experience. The idea was to create in man an awareness of the divine potential in him and to make him strive for its achievement. This was self-realization and the self, as a totality is indescribable and indistinguishable from a God image as man is considered as a part of the God. Self-realization, in religious or metaphysical terms, thus, amounts to God realization. Man's realization of his position in relation to the universe becomes the goal of his life 'Sakshatkara.'

The difference between Myth and Religion is that, religion is intensely alive, and makes the figures and incidents of mythology seem almost real, forever haunting the mind of the man and sometimes appearing more powerful and real than the people of contemporary world. It is religion that keeps the myth alive through rites, magical practices, dogmas etc.

In order to impress the powers of divinity, Gods are endowed with super human power and they perform miracles eg., 'Christ walking on Water', and 'Krishna lifting and balancing mount Govardhan on his little finger.' Priests, being the custodian of religion, are capable of performing some of these miracles.

Hell on the other hand evokes fear. The souls are described as being tortured in hell. If heaven's position was described as a place
above earth, the position of hell was described as beneath the earth. Heaven was full of light and hell full of darkness. Priests were aware of the fact that they could not be too stringent in the application of religious norms, therefore, they promised a salvation through God. Christ's descent into hell in order to save the suffering souls is both a myth and an archetype in the Harrowing of Hell. Lucifer rules hell in contrast to God who is the king of heaven in Christianity and 'Yama rules Naraka' the Eastern concept of Hell and 'Indra' reigns Lord in 'Swarga' or Heaven. The concept of heaven, hell, Lucifer and God need mentioning as Sylvia Plath refers to them as entities of a male world. The mythical taboos are converted into religious precepts and social norms by the priests to regulate social behaviour and curb libidinal urges. Observance of these norms, are enforced through fear of hell. The study of myth and its relation to religion becomes integral to understanding of the two poets Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. The two poets hold religion responsible for their sufferings. Sylvia Plath had sacrificed her independence and married Ted Hughes to be a fruitful wife by accepting the teachings of Christianity. Yet, the same religion had failed to curb her husband's adulterous behaviour leading to her loss of faith in religion. It was religion that played a dominant role in Kamala Das's marriage at a young age. Each stage in her life was shackled in the name of religious propriety. It was religion that bound her to a marriage devoid of love and sanctity.

Religion has the magical quality of delving deep into the psyche of man. This unity of myth and religion originates from a positive reaction against fears induced by the intellect. Man's progress from the
primitive to modern has brought about a change in his reasoning, wherein emotion has taken a back seat. Intellect, which dominates, creates a sense of fear regarding certain inevitable concepts like death and alienates man from nature. Myth through religion strengthens the emotional side of man and becomes a defense mechanism against the inevitability of death.

Myth is the driving force behind religious practices. Its element of dynamism is manifested in the great proselytizing movements, in crusade, religious war and prosecutions, in heresy of witch hunts, and in the creative efforts which caused man to build vast tombs and places of worship filled with every kind of treasure.21

Due to the chameleonic characteristics of myth, the meaning of the myth, which becomes the driving force behind religious precepts is directly colored by the mind that interprets it. Great myths become base and vulgar due to the confined and narrow vision of the interpreter eg., Krishna's amorous adventures with the Gopis. An allegorical illustration of the souls longing for the supreme soul is described as a purely sexual encounter. Although there are guidelines to interpret myths, they are not fool proof.

In conclusion, one can say that the difference between the priest and magician is that the, magician never doubts that the same causes will always produce the same results, that the performance of proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be

attended by the desired result, unless his incantation are thwarted or foiled by other more potent charms. He declares sovereignty over nature, but that is not unlimited. His power comes through controlling of certain forces, through performance of skillful rites. The magician speaks of his power over Gods and makes them bow to his whims and fancies. But treats the universal forces as unconscious and impersonal. Religion on the other hand is not controlling or gaining of power. It is about “propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.”

The priest treats the universal forces as conscious and personal and therefore, pleases them and pursues them to fulfill his wishes with the help of ‘mantras’. In the Hindu mythology, one finds that ‘mantras’ are more powerful than God as seen when the Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are controlled through mantras by the sages.

Religion led to certain forms of behaviour, which are now found as rites and rituals. Certain incidents with or without historical backgrounds are enacted, bringing the past into the present. Religion functions as a bridge between the past and the present. In religious ceremonies, it is compulsory to narrate the origin of the ceremony before the main ceremony is conducted. This system links the contemporary with the past and makes the man a continued product of the past. It gives him a sense of being whole. The Hindu religious

ceremonies, where narration, take place ends with the word ‘Phalashruti,’ meaning the result of listening to the narration.

**Myth and Language**

Primarily magic and gradually religion led to the development of communication i.e., language. ‘Language’ unlike ‘Myth’ is an achievement. The difference between myth and language lies in the fact that myth never breaks out of the magic circle of its figurative ideas, but language born in the same magic circle has power to break its bonds. Thus began the study of Myth and Language. Language and Myth are considered the twin modes of symbolic expression of man. The desire to express experience led to the birth of language, a communication between man and universe and man and man. Jung writing of language says, "Speech is a storehouse of images founded in experience." 23 Thus, Philologists and Anthropologists in the study of myth highlight the vital importance of myth in understanding not only the psyche of man but, the structure of language and thereby emphasize the role of myth in studying the very structure of human thought. The meaning of a Myth is, or the message conveyed becomes, of secondary importance in relation to the structure of thought.

Language thus creates images. These images appear in the form of symbols, which represent values. The mythic symbols are charged with intense feelings reminiscent of the original tension of man’s

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encounter with universal forces, which led to the myths and later to symbols. "In them, every part is the whole and every specimen represents the species, and these appear not so much symbols as such, as sacred objects, places or being and their import is felt as an inherent power." 24

The identity of meaning and the object of the symbol is at the root of superstition and religious beliefs, which we call the hypostatic state of mind. This tends to project primitive myth into the present life. The realm of the image becomes autonomous, revealing a new dimension of truth. Myth and Language inter-act and become inseparable, where words and names gain significant magic powers. The language with the help of sounds is believed to help in subjugating the evil forces and also please the Gods. The proper name or sound is linked not only with an object or person but its essence, its quality, which represents power, over a particular field or area of man's life on the universe. This is seen in the name of God, which needs to be pronounced perfectly in order to invoke the divine power. As in Indian Sanskrit heritage, in Rome too there was the art of pronouncing names of deities accurately. And elsewhere in religious history we encounter the view that the true nature of God, the power and diversity of his action is contained and, as it were, concentrated in his name. "In it rests the secret of divine plentitude: the diversity of God's name, many names of the divine, indeed, the thousands of names are a true indication of his

omnipotence." 25 Almost all the Hindu Gods and Goddess are worshipped in a religious ceremony called ‘Sahasra namarchane’, ‘Sahasra’ meaning ‘a thousand’, ‘nama’, meaning ‘name’ and ‘archane’ meaning ‘worship.’ These names are linked to various elemental powers. The name Oedipus or Ekalavya is alive as a symbol, an allegory or even a concept. A symbol thus represents anything that needs to be explained as something greater than ordinary. They represent a different reality for a passion or a way of being. Even Church allowed symbols like the cross, monogram of Christ etc., in Hinduism one has the geometrical Mandalas, the Om, etc.

Wheelwright discusses the plain language of every day life and the expressive language used in poetry, religion, myth and prose. Myth is expressive language and therefore used only for sacred purposes to explain the significance of situations, symbols or objects. Wheelwright states that the primitive language used symbols, which had semantic motion. He therefore, coins the word ‘metaphora’ which means motion, which can be figuratively comprehended as a semantic motion – away from the already settled meaning of a term. The primitive meaning is formed by a kind of semantic “Motion (phora) through (dia) a number of experiential elements.” 26 The word diaphora, was used to indicate of language rich in use of expressions. These languages had an element of

The archetypes are born out of such language of diaphoric situations. A contemporary act is connected to an event or act in life thus making an allegory of it and impregnating it with significance. According to Northrope Frye, Myths not only have become elements of culture, they are also the projection of the subliminal urges and archetypes. “It is the central informing power that gives archetypes significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence, the myth is the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative and archetype when speaking of significance.” 27

The symbols that are usually found in religious rites are that of life, death, birth, sun, moon, rain, fertility etc. In myth and ritual, death and rebirth of God, marriage of Gods and Goddesses, curses, boons, the conflict between good and evil, the Gods and demons, the challenge of man’s powers by divine forces, the destruction of man’s pride and his subjugation to divinity and a host of other motifs play a prominent role. Man is projected as the victim at times of divine whims and fancies, and absolved of tendencies of self-blame and suicide. The picture of man as a victim gives a cyclic assertion to man’s life assuring him of the temporal nature of sorrow and decay, and even of God’s wrath, which would gradually turn into blessings, eg., death and rebirth of Dionysius, or Christ. This is best illustrated in the ‘Avatāra’ theory of Hinduism. God incarnates himself and offers various explanations for the

unnatural happenings and also promises relief from the same. These incarnations form the very basis of reference in religious ceremonies. The destruction of evil by good is thus described and it helps in keeping man's hope alive. Catastrophes like floods, fire, earthquakes are given divine designs and are made palatable by the fact that once God's wrath cools down then will reign, peace and prosperity. An illusion of security is created which gives a proof as well as illusion of the eternity of the universe. Therefore, the myths, which dramatize stories have the central characters as gods and spirits wielding enormous power over nature. These characters are created in human likeness, but are invincible. They are capable of doing anything the writer's mind expects them to do. Man's mind satisfies many of his desires vicariously through myths. These myths were directly connected to the various processes found in nature. The important myths are "creation myths, fall and flood myths, metamorphosis and dying God myths, divine marriage and hero-ancestors myth, etiological myths, apocalyptic myths." 28

Great writers like T.S Eliot, W.B Yeats and James Joyce have expressed their views that to be of greater significance to mankind "Literature must be allied with myth.' Somehow, it is felt, the creating artist must capture a certain magical quality, a richness of imagery, a deep sense of primeval forces, a large order of aesthetic experiences." 29

Myth and Literature

The English term Myth is derived from the Greek 'Muthos', meaning 'Word' or 'Speech', 'The Thing Spoken', 'The Tale Told'. Any information transmitted verbally including both true and false, is included in the concept of 'myth'. Many modern critics like Maud Bodkin, Richard Chase, Northrope Frye, Robert Graves believe myth to be a literary genre by itself and as "Individual plot-pattern of many works of literature are the recurrences of basic mythic formula." E.M.W Tillyard refers to Myths as narratives and says that they represent:

Universal instinct of any group, large or small, to invest, almost always unconsciously, certain stories or events or places or persons, real or fictional with an uncommon significance to turn them into instinctive center of references...

Myths become units of wisdom to indicate the significance of any object, act or situation eg, cross refers to suffering, 'Amrut' refers to elixir of life, 'fire' refers to both inferno and fire of purification. To Raymond Williams, "Myth means many things from Plot; and 'Tale' to 'Fable.' In modern usage it is not merely a false version of reality but

also a representation of different kind of reality." 33 The psychic experience of Seers, poets endowed with mythic vision and also schizophrenics.

Myth as a story belongs to the world of art. Primitive myths, which are available to the artist, are used to achieve dreams of creative activity. The artist uses these myths to universalize his personal feelings. Man and nature are co-related in an artistic form by the creative artist as both are aesthetic expressions of man. Myths orally narrated when written down became literature. Modern criticism views mythically oriented literature as the manifestation of deep urge of modern man for a return to the past in search of explanation to similar sociological problems, which are illustrated by myths to be repetitive.

The study of two psychoanalysts, Freud and Jung become integral to understanding of the mythological elements used by the poets taken up for study here i.e., Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. They have made an attempt at understanding human behaviour as stemming from the unconscious dream levels and primitive instinctual urges which were born with man himself. They believe that the primitive desires have been stored up in man’s mind as in a store-house or the collective unconscious waiting to be opened up by some sudden situations of shock, surprise or religious exaltation and sometimes intense creative impulses too. Freud with his theory of Dream Analysis and Psychotherapy, created a new awareness in the scientific study of mankind. Freud upheld the view that man’s mind was a storehouse of

memories handed down through the centuries. He developed his theory on man and woman relationship. Everything was focused on sex consciousness. In the 19th century. When 'Myth' meant anything that was opposed to reality or the Christian world-view, meaning to be untrue, Freud changed its nature by giving it the position of the Great Primordial Truth, the precipitate of the unconscious. On the other hand, Jung identified myth as the archetype, which was present in the collective unconscious of the entire human race.

Man had his libidinal urges from Adam's time and gradually he had to control them for social reasons. The controlling of his basic instinct, according to Freud, put pressure on his mind, which flowed out in forms of dreams. In primitive society, there was only man and woman and their biological relationship until Totems were created to restrict their libidinal urges. Social behaviour was regulated to maintain the stability and safeguard man's life. Taboos as prohibitions regarding certain behaviour patterns to regulate human behaviour in the society came into existence. Some were temporary and some others permanent. These Taboos were created to ensure submission through fear. The temporary Taboos are ones regarding the menstruation of women and confinement after childbirth. The permanent ones are regarding human relationships, deceased persons etc. The transgression of these taboos meant disaster and sorrows. These taboos created a deep-rooted fear in the human mind and commanded an unquestioning obeisance. The fear turned into terror in instances of unconscious violation leading to psychic disorders, as the belief was that no remedy can reverse the effect of the same. The guilty mind becomes the harsh persecutor, even when,
the taboo violated is known only to the individual. The internal pressure of guilt creates a disharmony in the mental attitude of the person at times leading to schizophrenia, madness or suicidal tendencies. These characteristics are found in the 'confessional poets.' The fear of impending disaster hounds the guilt-filled mind and leads to suicide. Originally, the taboos were created and mythified for utilitarian purposes for protection of people and society from dangers.

One finds in Sylvia Plath the manifestation of a mind persecuted by fear for harbouring incestual desires. The fear is regarded as omnipotent and omnipresent and also personified as 'Johnny Panic' in her short story Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams. This fear has its origin in the incestual desires harboured for her dead father. This reflects the direct influence of Freud's Oedipus complex where he highlights the mother – fixation syndrome, characterized by excessive love by a son for his mother. In Sylvia Plath's case it is the excessive love of father, as she becomes Electra. Freud's concept of understanding man's life and actions repressed libidinal urges is seen in her search for a man like her father and her marriage to him. Freud's analysis is the very foundation on which she bridges her real present with the mythic past. It helped her in organizing the chaotic happenings around her leading to her unjustified sufferings. The myth of Prometheus is also seen to influence her vision and work in poems where she speaks of the uncontrollable desire for sexual union even when it is devoid of love. Sylvia Plath has consciously and meticulously made use of Freud's dream analysis in her short stories, where solutions appear in dream like situations.
Freudian analysis is also applicable to the Indian poet, Kamala Das, who is taken up for study here. Although there are no powerful references to incestual desires, the emphasis on repressed libidinal urges forms the very basis of her work. Yet, Freud’s influence needs no mention in her works, as Hinduism had accepted the importance of sexual needs and given it a prominent position in man’s life.

Sex as ‘Kama’ is given a very important position in the ‘Purusharthas’ of a man’s life in Hindu mythology. The Rg veda, deals with ‘Agni’ Doctrine and the role of fire in a Hindus life in various forms. Freud’s theory of Eros and Thanatos, that deals with the conflict between eroticism and death, which influenced the works of the two poets, is closely connected with the Fire myth of Freud that deals with ‘Eroticism’ and ‘Death.’ The Indian equivalent of this is ‘Shakti’ and ‘Shiva’. The two instincts are personified as immortals and struggle between the two becomes a battle of giants.

Totems are also part of a myth. They signify a sense of governing force in times when religion was not in existence and social institutions were yet to be formed. A totem can be an animal, plant or natural phenomenon, which is identified with a whole tribe or class of people. Like the ‘gotras’ of India, the clan of people, are believed to be descendants of the totem, and follow rites and rituals of a similar kind. The Totem becomes a protector patron of the clan, sometimes proves destructive to others, and aids the concept of exogamous marriage.

C.G. Jung formulated his theory on scientific psychology based on immediate experience with human beings. He states that the human
mind is concerned with consciousness and the human psyche includes the conscious and the unconscious. It has the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The ego is not always aware of the unconscious life force moving beneath its conscious region. The unconscious of the human psyche is older than the consciousness as it is the unconscious, which gives birth to the conscious. If one could call the conscious as the top layer of the psyche, then the second layer would be of the personal unconscious – the individual’s experiences, stored up from childhood, which come out in the form of dreams. The third layer would be of the collective unconscious, which is a storehouse of experiences not merely of the individual but his history as a homo-sapien, his basic instincts, inherited along with his past.

Jung’s understanding of an individual psyche based on scientific psychology is applicable to both the poets. First is the call of the collective unconscious and the second deals with the existence of the ‘anima’ and ‘animus’ in each individual. Unlike Freud, who looks back to childhood for trauma both in the individual and in the race, Jung looks forward to mature adulthood, where we learn how not to live as sexual beings but the way in which we are going to face death, as spiritual beings. He calls this process “discovery of psychic harmony beyond the ego individuation; the experience of the ‘self’ as the regulating center of the psyche.” 34

The influence of Jung is very powerfully felt in the works of the two poets taken up for study. Sylvia Plath refers to the call of the past, the matriarchal way of life where emotion and intuition played a prominent role. The suppression of these by the masculine intellect has created an imbalance, which in turn has transformed a woman of mysterious muse qualities into a dull housewife. The call of the pagan goddesses, the 'Lunar' muse and the 'great mother' lead Sylvia Plath to the 'White Goddess' of Robert Graves. The collective unconscious in her work plays a prominent role.

Kamala Das too speaks directly of the influence of her collective unconscious. She refers to her Nayar heritage and holds it responsible for the powerful sexual urges in her. She accepts the basic urge of union of the masculine and feminine forces as natural. As she belonged to a background where sex was considered as an essential part of man's life.

It is in their response to the collective unconscious one finds the difference in the attitudes of the two poets taken up for study. Jung's emphasis on man's capacity to transcend sexuality and achieve psychic union with the Supreme Being led Sylvia Plath to the reading of the translated version of Upanishads, and also Zen Buddhism.

In analysing the poems of Kamala Das, although Jung's theory holds good, it needs no special mention, as the goal of Hinduism is psychic unity. The unity of both the male and female and man and God is the basis on which Hindu mythology rests.

Jung endorsing the views of Greek writers Nietzsche and Levy Bruhl, highlights the existence of Archetypes. These archetypes guide a
man’s consciousness and thus his reactions to certain things will not be purely personal.

Behind the content of a symbol, is the idea of an overpowering all embracing, complete or perfect being represented by a man of heroic proportions or by an animal with magical attributes, or by a magical vessel or some other treasure hard to attain, such as a jewel, ring, crown or geometrically by a Mandala. This archetypal idea is a reflection of the individual’s wholeness i.e., of the self, which is present in him as an unconscious image.35

One of Sylvia Plath’s poem is entitled “Totem”. She also make use of concept of secreting one’s soul in a totem.

A touch of the past will be guiding and forming man’s responses. The recurrent motifs in man’s dreams, which are dregs of the past, are called the archetypal motifs. They are the products of all patterns of human mind, governed by tradition, migration and heredity. These archetypes are not like the inanimate objects, they are very powerful and autonomous, rising up at their own will, with no logical explanation being affordable.

C.G. Jung’s concept of the ‘anima’ and ‘animus’ too has given literary criticism a new perspective. According to him, the unconscious of a male has a female element, and the unconscious of a female has a masculine element. The archetypal woman in a man’s mind created by his mother image exercises a powerful influence on him. The Anima is connected with the virgin and pagan Gods and Goddesses due to its

spiritual values. These archetypal images can inspire both the creative and destructive forces in man’s psyche.

Sylvia Plath searches for a man like her father and is disillusioned after her marriage and adopts the destructive archetypal image of “Lady Lazarus,” and “Queen Bee.” She desires to destroy the masculine, which intimidates and suppresses her. She rejects even God because he is a male. This poetic vision of Sylvia Plath is in keeping with her American background which categorizes polarities eg., male and female. Kamala Das on the other hand, searches for the ideal male, for she believes that all men and women are same within although they appear different. She overcomes her frustration and accepts the Hindu philosophy of reconciliation in the concept of Ardhanarishwara and ‘Radha-Krishna.’ Jung’s analysis begins with faith in God, unlike Freud. The God image is central to Jung’s analysis. He invests myth with spiritual potency and as helping man to progress infinitely with the help of ancient venerable rituals to coordinate himself with the universe. The object of every person his progress both biological and psychological is described by Jung as self-realization.

The functional capacity of the myths can be charted as follows – First they worked as mediums through which the primitive man formed a relation with the universe by defining a position for himself. This led to formation of clan, communities and societies. The myths helped him to enforce social behaviour primarily through magic and later religion. The myths, which once were manifestations of man’s experience gained through his encounter with the forces of nature, gradually became
symbols, and archetypes pregnant with significant explanations for the happenings in the universe.

The age of science mentioned by Frazer began with the progress of civilization and increase in man's knowledge. As civilization progressed man became a rational animal. As his imagination took a back seat he started questioning the credibility of myths. Myths in the beginning were imbued with faith, awe and reverence, gradually, became just ritualistic and lost their immediacy and significance. This distancing in turn made myths into tales or events of the past to which people turned for reference. As Science progressed, man's confidence in himself increased and he realized his power over man, beast and nature. This awareness of his power made him self-centered, vain and cruel. New ideologies came into being displacing myths of universal value, which were both positive and negative in conception. The first myth for man's cruelty can be seen in "The Myth of Nazism" in the theory of racial superiority of the Aryans, enacted by Hitler in Germany, which led to the execution of millions of innocent Jews. The positive myths are of America - The land of liberty and Receding frontier. These new myths were shallow and egoistic, being politically motivated.

Myth and Modern Literature

The interpretation of myth in literature is of prime importance. It can be studied as a symbol, an allegory or a concept. The myth gives

multitudinous meanings to suit the changing order of the society. Myth influences every walk of man's life, its shapes his thought, and his social, religious, and moral attitudes. The connection between myth and literature can be seen in Frye's words. Where he endorses the simplest meaning of the Greek word 'myth' which means, "... a myth is a story, myth is narrative or poetic literature" Myth therefore is art and must be studied as such. Myth is a mode of cognition, a system of thought, a way of life, only as art is." 37

In literature too one needs to make two obvious divisions. The first kind is literature that derives from and reinforces the operant myth. The second is literature that is by itself mythical, literature that, a group have produced as their mouthpiece that starts as the accepted type of their own opinion and emotions. The Bhagavad Gita, the Bible etc., for example are mythical in themselves, guiding a set of people. The stories within them are pieces of literature, which reinforce the operant myths.

In search of universality, literature, especially in the form of Plays and Poems make use of mythic patterns. Myth as art gives a broader perspective of the poetic theme. Poetry and Drama are woven around myths. According to Richard Chase, myth cannot be identified only with religion or philosophy.

Myths as fables become literature, they provide concepts and pattern to literature and they also supply plot, character, themes and images to literature. The relation between myth and literature is

mutual. Myths give transcendental characteristic and literature helps in keeping myths alive by offering explanations to the younger generation regarding certain aspects of life. Literature with the help of myths makes our experiences intelligible to ourselves by providing an insight into the workings of man's mind in a society. Myths help literature in transposing the event from the interior to the external world and vice versa. They help in the elimination of the vagueness of internal experience by concreting the indeterminate force within as God or a demon.

**Myth and Poetry**

Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts and must dig frantically for roots, be it among the most remote antiquities. What does our great historical hunger signify, our clutching about us of countless other cultures, our consuming desire for knowledge, if not the loss of myth, of a mythic home, the mythic womb, said Nietzsche.

Richard Chase emphasizing the relation of myth and Poetry says, Myth is art and "Poetry is the substructure of Myth." 39

The use of myth in a poem is not just for the need of a skeletal framework, but an urge of emotional association, which forces the poet to search for a myth that would suit his/her predicament in a modern world. The poet here becomes as dynamic, and ironically, as helpless as the primitive man who gave birth to that myth in a similar emotional condition. The tragedy of intelligence bestowed upon man as a gift

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leads to regular conflicts between conflicting loyalties and the emotional necessity of choice keeps cropping up. The myth used by the poet or referred to may assume different forms fulfilling different purposes. The persistent use of a myth depends on the social, psychological and emotional turmoils of a person. The modern poets have discovered that the well dressed people living around them in a so called scientifically progressive age, are also full of brutal and incestual impulses as Frazer warns us that, "our civilization is a very thin veneer on top of what is really savagery and superstition." 40 Freud implies that inspite of progress and education, which tend to remove superstition, there exists a majority of mankind which still believes in sacrifices and the new moon, full moon, etc.

This realization of hidden reality of man’s mind short circuits the sensitive creative mind. There is a terrible conflict in what he sees and what he believes. This conflict creates an awakening which one can call insight, vision, illusion or enlightenment. In this state the poet - artist expresses his feelings through images. These images are metaphorical. The poet - writer feels a strong nameless presence against which definite daemonic or divine images can take shape.

The basic pre-requisite for definite divinities is the division of the realm of the ‘holy’ from that of the ‘profane’ the self feels steeped, as it were; in a mythico - religious atmosphere, which ever enfolds it, and in which it now lives and moves, it takes only

a spark, a touch to create the god or daemon out of this charged atmosphere.  

Frazer's profound influence on the imagery of modern poetry is very significant. His God-eating ritual, his dying God myth, his king of the wood myth, fertility myths now found in most of the poems written indicate how man's mind keeps grappling with the mysteries of the world, especially, death and life after death.

These images are archetypes and reveal a variety of contemporary approaches into the inherited past, trying to transcend the immediate time searching for order and meaning in this life.

A myth gets retold, it gets modified or elaborated, taking different forms in literature and especially in poetry it gets a 'poetic life'. This definition becomes highly significant in view of the topic taken up for study, i.e., the study mythological elements in the poems of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das. The tragic fact that cannot be undermined is the heavy dependence of myths on the interpreters. Due to its chameleonic characteristic it falls prey to the whims and fancies of the interpreters. As myths are the driving force behind religious beliefs, they indirectly govern the attitudes of people in a society. Great myths become base and vulgar due to the narrow and confined vision of the interpreters and sometimes lead to fanaticism, which is reflected in the two poets taken up for study here.

Sylvia Plath selected the myths influenced by her socio-cultural and religious background, which in turn was the outcome of the interpretation of myths by the priest and scholars of her age. In the limelight at that time was Freud, who provided an alternative to religion by his interpretation of 'myth' as 'The Great Primordial Truth'. Minds devastated by the wars and its atrocities disillusioned by the Papal consent to persecution of Jews amounting to fanaticism turned to Freud. Robert Lowell, whose *Life Studies*; transformed Sylvia Plath out look both towards life and work accepted Freud as God. Lowell's interpretation of Freud, influenced his works. The interpretation of Freud coloured by Lowell's vision influenced Sylvia Plath. The other great person who influenced Sylvia Plath is Robert Graves. His interpretation of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, coloured by his relationship with Laura Riding created the 'White Goddess Myth' which is adapted by Sylvia Plath. Freud's analysis helped her to magnify her childhood traumas and Frazer's analysis helped her in giving these traumas a mythic dimension. Frazer's opening of new vistas full of dying Gods, mourning by votaries of these Gods, resurrection concepts of magic, occult, taboos, totems, etc., proved an attractive alternative. The colourful concepts of Pagan religion appeared more resourceful than the insipid precepts of Christianity, which had no practical applicability to Sylvia Plath. These aspects helped her form a mythic schema for her Freudian traumas.

The positive aspects of Jung's analysis of myth, emphasizing faith in the existence of God and Psychic Union, led Sylvia Plath's attempt at understanding the *Bhridaranyaka Upanishad* translated by Yeats. This
is seen in her poems "Totem", "Mystic", "Paralytic" and mainly "Getting There", where she deals with rebirth and immortality of the soul. She also took refuge for a short while in Zen Buddhism. Thus the influence on her life and poetry had traversed a long way from Frazer to Freud, to Robert Lowell to Robert Graves before becoming her own.

The influence of mythological interpretation of Kamala Das's life and poetry was also coloured by the minds, which guided the interpretations of the Hindu myths at that time. The myth of Parasurama, which created her community and laid down rules regarding the woman-folk shaped her attitude towards live. The joint family was the main medium through which these mythical interpretations were handed down generation after generation, and naturally were coloured by different minds. The Manu Smriti, which is the most controversial of book of conducts, was interpreted in a way so as to subjugate women in the name of religious propriety. A woman was considered unworthy of freedom. Mythological characters were held up as role models, and interpreted to suit the needs of the interpreting mind. Thus Sita's boldness in following her husband into the forest was transformed into a docile following of a subservient wife. The best illustration one can find in the subjective interpretation of the mythological characters and its influence is seen in the amorous adventures of Krishna with the Gopis. An allegorical illustration of the soul's longing for the Supreme Soul accepted in traditional societies, become a pure sexual passion in Bengal. The influences of both the interpretations are found in the poems of Kamala Das.
Freudian analysis that man’s behaviour stems from his libidinal urges is applicable to both the poets. Yet, Kamala Das’s poetry needs no analysis from the Freudian point of view as she is a Hindu and in Hinduism man’s libidinal urges in the name of ‘Kama’ has been assigned a prominent position in man’s life. ‘Kama’ comes before ‘Moksha’, as the step before salvation in the four ‘Purushartas’. The concept of psychic unity discussed by Jung too, is not new to Hinduism. The basis of Hinduism is transcending of physicality and move towards psychic unity.

This also illustrates that myth is a form of verbal art and belongs to the world of arts and deals not with the world that man contemplates or lives in but the one that man creates. Thus, modern man’s interest in myth is akin to the study of any artist to the primitive tools of an artist, including imagination. They try to provide a kind of tradition, sometimes obliterating boundaries separating legend and actual history.

In every age when poets become thinkers and watch with consternation, the progress of science, man’s increasing alienation from nature and worry about the fate of the faithless man, his desires, create literary themes out of myth. Homer, Spencer, Milton, Shelly, Keats created immortal works with the use of myth. Dante and Milton created epics to prove their faith in Christianity. Poets with no faith in either classical or Christian mythology have used myth to make their works symbolical. God, man and myth are brought together when human form and natural content are brought in poetry. Every myth creates a universe of its own, in which Gods represent the whole of nature in humanized form and at the same time show in perspective man’s origin,
his destiny, the limits of power and extension of his hopes and desires. Analogy and identity are the two great conceptual principles, which are used in myth in poetry. Analogy establishes parallels between human life and natural phenomena and identity conceives a 'Sun-God’ or a 'Tree-God’. Myths seize on the fundamental elements of design offered by nature – the cycle of days, seasons and assimilate it to human cycle of life, death and rebirth. Yet, one ought to remember that literature is more flexible than myth, and interprets the myth either increasing or decreasing its prominence to suit its purpose. One cannot ignore the fact that although myths cannot be placed historically they tend to point backwards to the origin of arts, be it literature, painting or sculpture. Thus, modern man’s interest in myth is akin to the study of any artist to the primitive tools of an artist, including imagination. They try to provide a kind of tradition, sometimes obliterating boundaries separating legend and actual history.

Nicolas Berdyaev speaking about man as a product of the past says, “he is not a separate unit, but by the virtue of his inner nature becomes a sort of microcosm in which the whole world of reality and all the great historical epochs combine and co-exist. He is not merely a minute fragment of the universe but, rather a world in his own right.” 42

Myth transcends the immediate present and links the poet to his primeval past. Myths create substitutes for existing situations, which overwhelm the poet with their force and enslave his soul to an entirely

different world, which becomes the reality beyond the existing reality, guiding the poet’s mind into an entirely different world with its own promises of his salvation and destruction.

The gaze of the mythically oriented artist is different from that of an ordinary artist. The vision of the ordinary artist will be in deep perception of the immediate reality of the object of contemplation. The vision of the mythically oriented artist will be of an outsider, observing the object of contemplation in its relation to its surroundings the past and the future. This vision will find a corresponding situation in collective unconscious. This will create an awareness of the cyclic action of phenomenon in nature making the poet’s life a living myth or the incarnation of a past myth, connecting the poet to his past. In Sylvia Plath’s life and death one finds the incarnation of the myth of Cleopatra, but in a different form. In the life of Cleopatra, one finds Aphrodite in person, with links to other goddesses like Ishtar and Artati. She is considered as the consummate picture of a ‘Dionysiac Stimulae’ or an earthly embodiment of Aphrodite: Yet, one cannot undermine the subjective existence of the life lived by her. She killed herself by putting the asp to her breast. This type of dying brings her closer to Ishatar, to whom, the snake was familiar and to the Egyptian Isis, who is represented clad in the dress of scales holding a snake to her bosom. Cleopatra fulfilled her Aphrodite character even unto death. Sylvia Plath too found the identifications and lived the character unto death, but in a subjective manner. This identification of the poetic consciousness with antiquity leads to the adoption of the myths. This does not simplify the action to be an empty imitation proves, but
mythical identification. The poetic consciousness does not merely follow the antique identity but becomes the identity. The difference between the two is annihilated. Poetry of mythical consciousness, therefore gains not only deeper significance, but, transcendental characteristics. According to Thomas Mann, living and dying become significant when done "in the celebration of the myth." 43 The life in a myth becomes a religious act, the performance by a celebrant of a prescribed procedure. The birth of Christ, is celebrated because of his death, it becomes a feast. Feasts are anniversaries, and they renew the past in the present eg., the legend of Osiris which represents the life and sufferings of Osiris. Thomas Mann, in the above discussion, diverts from the existing importance laid on the social and collective myth and focuses on the "individual exemplar myth in the light of which a 'depth' biographer or creative writer may choose to view and represent his hero's personality and the role and the vicissitudes of his career...and the possibility of a fresh incarnation of a mythic character consciously accepted as a way of life." 44

It would be highly improper to assign literature secondary status in comparison to science and to consider it to be the wanderings of a mind inactive and un-utilitarian to society. It is literature in any form that works to expose the conscience of man in a given era. It elevates the reader, arouses his sense of justice by pursuing truth in a subtle

manner knocking on the heart of the reader. As R. Peacock points out, “acting as a vehicle of general human truth, it embodies vicarious remorse for the guilt of life.”

He continues to say that, “one of the ways in which they become serious is when they are statements of the hidden truth about ourselves. Remorseless statements to induce remorse. Hidden truths, because we conceal ourselves all the time in our daily affairs.”

Poets speak from the personal point of view having the capacity of universalizing the same with the help of myths. They link the present situation to the past creating in the modern man an awareness of his debt to the past. If myth in the beginning, formed through imagination of primitive man can be compared to a dream, then poetic expression can be considered as the dream of the modern man, where people no longer live in Prof. Campbell’s words, “A mythologically instructed community.” One finds the modern poets struggling to find or create a satisfactory and challenging myth as aspiration. The myths that are treasures of an instructed community, provide the models and the programmes in terms of which, the growth of internal cast of identities is moulded and spirited.

46. R. Peacock, Ibid., p.34.
The two poets taken up here for comparative study have turned to myths with the similar purpose of finding a solution to the tension between the masculine and feminine forces. The two poets taken up for study here, Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das, are modern individuals plagued by "the conflicting pattern of political doctrine, religious intensities and human monstrosities." These two poets taken for comparative study serve as good examples of sensitive women of the scientific age.

A study of their sociological background would not be irrelevant at this point as we have already emphasized the influence of myths in all walks of a person's life. Speaking of comparison one tends to make the mistake of taking either of them as counterparts of Eastern and Western civilization, although, it is partially true one cannot just blindly compare and contrast certain issues without an understanding of their backgrounds which led to certain archetypes and their adaptation in their works. Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das adopted the confessional mode of writing to express their innermost strifes, depicting a saga of woman's struggle for existence in a world as hostile as the primitive one, yet, inhabited by the so called educated and cultured people. The difference being that, they had no powerful myths to guide them towards the meaning of their existence like the people of the primitive society.

In the primitive times, when survival was the sole pre-occupation, there was no question of man and woman. They were but two people

joined together against the uncanny hostile forces in nature, which threatened their very existence. Gradually, as they learnt to control nature or to say, protect themselves, the work got divided between the two sexes. This did not lead to any kind of injustice to either of the sexes. All myths formulated at that time were spun around man-woman relationship. The natural forces too were assigned masculine and feminine qualities. As civilization progressed, and certain concepts were born, the woman found herself to be in a suppressed position. Considering the fact that both man and woman had encountered the natural forces together all the definitions regarding the myths of the past apply to the woman too. The unconscious of the woman too disturbs her psyche initiating it to find solutions for herself. This irrepressible urge finds its expression in creativity. Jung speaking about collective unconscious says if “We might call it a collective human being combining the characteristics of both the rises, transcending youth, age, birth and death, and, from having at his command a human experience of one or two million years, almost immortal . . . . . the present would mean neither more not less to him than any years . . . he would possess the living sense of the rhythm of growth, flowering and decay.”

The existing contemporary world with its social norms suffocates the woman writer and she strives for a universalization of her personal problem, turning to a myth for refuge. The stark reality of hidden

savagery in the refined mankind shocks the sensitive mind, leading to psychic disorders.

Sylvia Plath, born of a German father and a Jewish mother, had an inborn conflict regarding her affection towards them. Sylvia Plath needs to be recognized as an American with the American dream of materialistic accomplishments, - each one to oneself. The desire for "fruitful means of the realization of the dreams as reflected in the rags to riches heroes of the Horatio Alger myth,"50 proves detrimental to her desire of creation despite material recognition. The inherent clash in her life might have resulted from the Jewish-American Literature of the writer's like David Mamet, Israel Horowitz and Arthur Miller. The literature produced by these writers acted as a "social seismograph registering the changing view towards the dream with an eloquent portrayal of the injustice and moral bankruptcy of the American scene."51

The American imagination reveals a characteristic central image of man obviously springing from the complex reality of American culture. The American poet, replaces 'Fate' with conscience, in a rational manner and his futile struggle in shaping his destiny, is manifest in his poems. A look at, the American literary turn out, one

51. Ibid.
notices the absence of one long tradition, there has been oscillation between 'Schools of Hope' and 'Schools of Despair.'

The American's are unique in their attitude towards the actions of their country. They identify with the tragedies caused by their country, and it leads to a conflict of individual conscience and national conscience (welfare). They realize that the phrase 'national welfare,' is nothing but a hoodwinking of real moral values. The respect for humanity is only verbal, as their scientific oriented actions justify senseless brutalities in the name of progress. The terror at one's capacity of cruelty and inhumanity is a painful awareness which haunts the modern artist and he also sees in G.E. Woodberry's words, "the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive, religious instinct to find a meaning for life in and to comfort its fears of death with." 53

The poet's helplessness in changing the situation enstranges him from the society, which nourishes him, leading to a sense of his restlessness and rootlessness, as Pearl Buck "For were we not naturally restless, none of us would be Americans at all." 54 A feature reflected in Sylvia Plath's poems.

54. Pearl Buck, cited in Sisirkumar Ghose, Ibid.
These American poets including Sylvia Plath expose a fear of themselves, being fully aware of the capacity of man's degeneration. They adopt a phony toughness both in their lives and works with a futile attempt at concealing the inner hurt. Their poems are devoid of natural goodness. The enstranged minds, become disoriented and lose their capacity of perceiving situations in its true light and turns to myths of the past, as religion and society fail to provide explanation for the unjustified suffering rampant in the society. The Poet experiments with his own life searching for a new truth. There rests a deep desire for felicity of life, sanctity of human relationship beyond material demands and social sanctity. Life becomes loathe-some when it is stripped off the false facade of civilization, and the violation of human integrity is resented.

Poetry is sometimes considered to be prophetic, as it has been instrumental many a times bringing about revolutions, in the history of mankind. Yet, the reality is different, many critics feel that poetry is a "highly developed mind working in a primitive way." 55 This remark points to its inherent connection with myth. Therefore, one finds that the artist fills his work with rich suggestive symbolism from the past myths. These symbols of tragic vision emerge from the conflict between appearance and reality hubris plays a prominent role, where the artist passes through a phase of suffering in order to prove oneself worthy of a finer realization. The artist is caught in the meshes of the immediate reality, which is made up of love and life. In order to reach the state

where the self can struggle for its identity, the artist has first to grapple with individual, family, society, church and state. These five are interlocked, creating a web of conflicting loyalties where the artist has to make the choice and any choice made becomes a tragic one. Especially if it is a woman writer, the realization comes at the cost of something else, which is dear. Her motherhood is at stake. The two poets taken up for study here are fine illustration of this situation.

Sylvia Plath, being a product of this American culture, realized that the only independent action in a world of hypocrisy was suicide. Death was in her control and life was not. Sylvia Plath had become a student of Dr. Robert Lowell, whose life and works symbolized affluence and agony of the American culture. His confessional mode of writing helped her to pour out her struggle in the form of poetry. The external conflicts having lost dramatic significance she indulges in internal conflicts that are of a psychic nature. The terrible negativeness of the society and the order of the human psyche in its battles against ugliness, despair, violence and treachery is reflected in her poems.

Sylvia Plath tries to approach her tragic situation through images and narration, which can be done only through poetic logic. The poet is forced to depend upon introspection and intuition, because, there is, an awareness that reason alone cannot reach the higher realities or the inner most recesses of the soul. The poet's return to the past reflects the need for an organization of the chaotic emotion ranging between the psyche and the contemporary world. Mythological symbols help in giving these emotions a pattern.
Modern man is no different from the primitive man facing the hostile forces of nature. He finds himself as vulnerable and helpless as the primitive man but with the added fear of being responsible for the horror around him and returns mentally to the age-old days of myth. In Sylvia Plath, one finds the man-woman relationship strikingly depicted both as a daughter and wife. The tension between the female and the male forces is underlying current of her poems. The main image depicted is that of the father. The fatal attraction to her father who belonged to the murderous Nazi class tortures her American mind, which revolted against the execution of innocent Jews. At the same time, she marries a man equally gigantic in structure, physically and figuratively imposing the father image onto him. The sense of incestual guilt, haunting her makes her identify with 'Electra' and later a 'Queen Bee.' leads to her mental disharmony. The strange yet interesting fact worth noticing in her life is the role of women. Although they lived in a patriarchal society it seemed as if only apparently the men were stronger. In times of crises Sylvia Plath's grandmother supported Sylvia Plath's mother, and Sylvia Plath's mother in turn supported Sylvia Plath. This led to an illusion of the irrepressible power of the ancient mother. Thus, mother archetype plays a prominent role in her poems. Sylvia Plath's life as a woman, an American female originating from a personal symbol, during her hubris assimilates within her the sharply defined ethnic traits, as a result of myths used by her. Sylvia Plath's personality rooted in a living tradition, with its social and aesthetic values, and also in her exalted moments of dramatic consciousness attains the immanence and universality of archetypal feminine
experience, which is strongly endorsed by her husband Ted Hughes. Sylvia Plath’s adaptation of Robert Grave’s ‘White Goddess,’ shows her indignance at the patriarchal tradition, which forced her to subjugate her self to male domination. As already discussed, Sylvia Plath falls back on Freud, C.G. Jung, Robert Graves and Frazer to provide her a myth analogous to her life. Sylvia Plath’s attempt at inculcating the Eastern concept of psychic union, perhaps, failed as her reading was confined to the translated versions of W.B. Yeats’s Bhridaranyaka Upanishad.

This revelation of the self and its journey is typical of the Western world, which worships psychoanalysis as a supreme force. Hailing from a country, which gave the literary world great poets like Eliot, Yeats, Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau, it is strange to observe Sylvia Plath adapting a myth of destruction. The above, mentioned poets going through the similar process of disenchantment with material affluence, had gone out to nature for refuge. They had also tried to find an answer in the Eastern Vedanta, which helped them to transcend the material disillusionment, which they treated justly as temporary and succeeded in upholding the nobility of man in his real essence as a creature of nature. It perhaps was lack of mental stamina, due to ill-health and monetary problems, which prevented a poet like Sylvia Plath from selecting a myth with the germ of self upliftment. Tragically she selected the myth appropriate to her temporary problem, which she allowed to overwhelm her. Her suicide was a manifestation of the myth she staunchly adapted.
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. It was the Horatio Alger myth that motivated her mother's dreams for her children. The Horatio Alger myth fuelled the intensity of Sylvia Plath's conflict between the aesthetic drive and material desires. Her desire to create irrespective of material achievements was thwarted due to this myth. Her work was inextricably linked to the myth. The fifth one is the myth of Nazism of the Aryan's enacted by Hitler needs mentioning because her poems abound in Nazi imagery and also because her father was a German and her mother, partly Jewish.

Kamala Das, the Indian poet taken up study here hails from India. The autobiographical style of writing was not an ancient Indian feature. People, saints, poets and philosophers wrote about their egos but in a universal manner and the thrust was towards self-effacement and not glorification of ego, which is a common feature found in American Biographies. The Vedas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata etc., are described as biographical narratives, with the primary aim of enlightening the common man. The Islamic invasion gave rise to a new kind of writing, wherein gifted writers were employed for glorifying the
king's actions and heroism. Biography, gradually moved away from myths towards history, and also gave rise to autobiographical writings. In the ancient times the unit of activity was not an individual but a community, therefore, there was no chance of self-centered writing because the ego was believed to be only an infinitesimal part of the supreme creator. One seldom finds the mark or signature of the artist on age-old carvings, poems, sculptures, paintings etc. Autobiography implies a linear sense of time, which was not known to the Hindu point of view. The real autobiographical poems were born during the Bhakti movement from the eleventh to seventeenth century. The saint poets, Basavanna, Mira, Akkamahadevi, Kabir, Tulasidas, Tukarama, Chaitanya, Narsi Mehta came with their overwhelming works of devotion. There was a change in the attitude towards the ego, the movement was from ego effacement to ego sublimation. They wrote about their ordinary life with all its pettiness, squalor, prejudices and variety. But the poet wrote about himself as a human metaphor and not as his personal self. It brought social and moral significance to it, thus inspiring millions of people to purify their minds. It was the British Colonial rule, which gifted India with the fashions of being self conscious as an artist. The focus thus shifted from macro to micro, from community to individual. The individual ego gained prominence. The impact of English rule was such that English education slowly infiltrated into the local colour. Kamala Das's My Story, is a remarkable of the infiltration of Western ideology into a tradition Hindu joint family, and its disintegration on economic grounds. The first generation of Indians educated in English, started valuing western values of
sentimentalism, egoistic excess, nostalgia, freedom of thought and action, and the past values of integrated community emotions got devalued. Indian writers adapted the western literary values of individualism through the English Romantic poets like Keats, Wordsworth etc. The cultural background of Indian writers being of an entirely different kind could not be expressed in the foreign language. They also found it difficult to follow individualism as a social concept as the family values indoctrinated in them made it impossible, for them to accept the new imported values. In the mid nineteenth century, Indian literature was a hotchpotch of Western values adapted without practicability.

Poets like Sarojini Naidu wrote poetry using Indian myths, but without getting rid of the acquired romantic idiom and diction. The Indians who produced literature at that time, thought of it as an exercise in nostalgia and egoism. Poetry at that time became an escape into a personality, Dom Moraes, Aubry Menon and Kamala Das being the examples of the same. India is a country of many cultures, and the synchronization of multiple dialects, thoughts, beliefs and cultures is reflected as a unique feature in the works of these poets. This becomes the Indianness that desires mentioning in comparison to the Americanness of Sylvia Plath’s poem. English became and still is the medium through which the Indian poet tries to portray the struggle for identity. It is quite sad to see Kamala Das adapting the confessional mode of Sylvia Plath, when she could easily have found classical models in her own mother tongue and nativity. Yet, she too is a product of the twentieth century, poet of fictional autobiography and although she is
rooted in Indian context, she follows the pattern of Plath whose roots are Western. Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Savithri’ has huge autobiographical sections, yet, the poem is modelled on high romantic poems and is full of spirituality. Jayanta Mahapatra’s tries to bring together myth, history and autobiography. Toru Dutt is another poet who tried to celebrate the women in Indian mythology like ‘Savithri’.

The post-colonial Indian writers show signs of being compulsive talkers, as seen in Kamala Das. There is an excessive love for language, and this love, is not positive but comes from a kind of desperation, stemming from isolation, reminiscent of the compulsive story telling of the primitive men, surrounded by dark forests. Kamala Das belongs to this post-colonial period of writers. This isolation is caused due to alienation from one’s cultural heritage and failure in adaptation of the new one. This can be compared to the Death of the old God. These poets forget that English language is still a speech for a small segment of Indian society and is essentially a tool for bilingual writers, and in no way can the English language communicate the musical, or traditional depths of Indian sensitivity. Therefore, the poet writing in English, seldom finds the right word to express deep rooted feelings. Language, being a system of signs, can circulate significantly like Totems in only a particular society. Outside that cultural community, they carry no meaning at all. The myths adopted are the only concrete signs of Indian-ness, although sometimes they fail to convey the significance in relation to the contemporary world.
Kamala Das, a bilingual poet, has her roots firmly planted in traditional background of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas and Upanishads etc. Her attempt to write in English has come due to English education, which created a split in her mental attitude. The traditionally nurtured girl with English education is a typical example of the post-colonial writers. The conventional upbringing and idealistic nurturing on the one hand, and the unconventional escapade into individualism on the other, forces the Indian woman writer to strike a balance between two ways of life. The English language becomes a symbol of revolt. The conventional nurturing keeps raising its hood in the form of mythical archetypes, sending warning signs of ruin in the case of breaking the age-old mould of the perfect woman. In Kamala Das one finds the transition from a traditionally oriented woman to a forward looking, intellectually strong, but emotionally shattered wife of an ordinary accountant. Her poems provide us with incidents, which led to the dichotomous social and private self-image of women. What one finds in Kamala Das, is the urge, of expressing the 'real self' as against the existing archetypes of witch, whore, doll, goddess, etc., and this urge of the English educated woman leads to innumerable 'me's'. In Kamala Das, one finds, a voice showing a disaffiliation with the mythological woman characters, held up as role models. The mythological 'Sita,' the archetype of the passive suffering woman is not acceptable to the modern woman poet, and the rebellion is manifest in the desire for freedom from male bondage. The poems also reveal the hidden desires of feminine self-longing for expressive actions regarding
man-woman relationship. Motherhood is accepted for its function of creativity and not, as a divine phenomenon, which is her sole identity.

The purpose of the study is to trace the degree of deviation from the society, tradition and existing norms and its effect on the poet's psyche and her works. Kamala Das, after poems of exploration into the new culture of individualism, turned back to the myths of Hinduism, which emphasize the reconciliation of opposing forces, by making them complimentary to each other.

The main myths used by her are three. The first is the myth of Parasurama, which led to her Dravidian ancestry and 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 myth is the Radha-Krishna myth, which she uses to reconcile herself to her fate both as a woman and soul.

The two poets, Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das have tried to find an independent identity, which is not synonymous with feminism. The 'ism' involved here is the same that urges a man to search for an answer in the modern world. Tragically, the women are far more entrenched in their role – governed identities in the communities, and at every turn of life, are reminded of their gender unlike the husbands, more freedom as individuals with questioning and philosophic frames of minds. A woman is forced to pay a great price for freedom of expression, which is not the case with man. The failure of religion, in ensuring the sanctity of marriage and disillusionment of faithless marriage, led to the
interplay of the self and the world, giving it a new dimension. These poets had to look down deep into the resources of the self, to find the cause of suffering in their life caused due to no fault of theirs. The main point highlighted in their poetry is not only the focus on female consciousness, but the intricate and complex nature of reality, which leads to a conflict between the hard claims of materialism, the call of the spiritual and the struggle between the forces of life and death. The two poets exhibit the tragic inability of the modern woman poet to comprehend the existential loneliness and failure to accept it, a failure to work out and maintain relationships, and the recognition of the self, simultaneously. The woman from the patriarchal tradition, being recognized through her relationship with men and the lack of identity as an individual is highlighted in their poems. Although Kamala Das hailed from matrilineal background, the society hardly allowed her the freedom of independent living. The poems have a continual refrain of the modern social structure, which fails to cater to their needs and forces them into roles, which clash with their ideals making them miserable.

The self of the modern woman poet is submerged as she meticulously, fulfills the obligations heaped upon her. Her identity is lost in her journey of life, where she evaluates and moulds herself in accordance with the demands of the religion, society and family, which have not changed even in the modern world. The submerged self, when hurt beyond endurance, awakens, and tries to analyze the cause of its sufferings leading to a dimension of independence in contrast to the image of the accepted social self.
It is the search of the inner self, triggered off by certain incidents or a series of incidents that push these women poets on to the confessional mode of writing. Being basically women of the archetypal, mythological character, they cannot easily free themselves from their gender-oriented images. Their poems are full of gynocentric images. The poetic devices used are of the recurrent ‘She’ or ‘I’, birthing metaphors, cyclic pattern of matrilineal relationships, nursing, motherhood, sex in marriage, out of it etc. The birth imagery is used to describe the awakening of both the women and the artist. In the poems of these poets one finds an earthliness, a strong desire to face reality, deep concern for nurturing of life and values of small tender acts of kindness. The regular development found in these poems is one of victims to survivors, which is clearly seen in both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das in the initial stages. Unfortunately, Sylvia Plath decided to end her struggle and succumbed to the desire of death. These poets, depict the slow emergence from painful indignation, self-analysis and self-awareness in their poems. Distracted to near madness, by their sense of outrage, they turn to myths available to them to seek a pattern to their life of unmerited suffering. The myths help them to externalize their dialogues with the self, mapping the contours of their lonely mind as they go about robot-like, doing their everyday household chores, from which they cannot escape due to their gender responsibility. The beauty of the poems, lie in the keen perception of every day mundane activities, in spite of the intense suffering of the self within. They carry with them the collective unconscious of exploitation of centuries, hurt emotions and feelings. The images which keep recurring in the poems
of the two poets, come from the collective unconscious of their respective cultural heritage, in which they roots are firmly planted. The modern woman poet’s return to mythical forms is in part an attempt to reconstitute the value laden natural environment that science has tended to discredit. The law of average turns meaningless because it tends to nullify individual tensions, which are unique. The modern woman poet shows an inclination inwards, the repossession of a cultural heritage hoping for solace from the senseless brutality of the modern scientific world. In using myths the poet draws continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. The poets select the myths not only at random, but with a desire of controlling, ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is rampant in the modern world. The use of myth is the manifestation of the poets success in attaining an inner discipline where the external world has very little to offer. W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau, Sylvia Plath, Sri Aurobindo, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, Balamani amma and Kamala Das are a few poets who have consciously made use of myth in their works.

The role of the reader is that of accepting Paul Ricour’s view that we must go beyond the modern view of “myth as false explanation to a sense of its exploratory significance and its contributions to understanding.” 56 He speaks of the ‘symbolic functions’ of myth, its power of discovery and revelation. According to him “myth cannot be

explained away; it implies a horizon, it is a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world." 57

In other words, while myth may be paradigmatic and while it may imply a social and cosmic order, or perfection, it also carries with it a promise of another mode of existence entirely, to be realized just beyond the present time and place, which the poets try to achieve through their creative vision. It is not only fundamental (as in fertility and creation narratives) but also liberating (as in deliverance and in many heroic and literary narratives).

In conclusion, one could say that not reason but imagination was the key to myth. Myth is not a failed attempt to articulate rational truth but is the creative impulse underlying human history. Primitive mythopoeia was the source of all experience and all expression.

The remark above states the reason for the adoption of myths by poets. These myths not only help the poet to begin with the existing myth to form a frame work, but they also help him to fuse his experiences with it and render it in a new form. The imaginative fusion takes place in poetry and actualities are transformed into types, transcending the contemporary and giving these types more beauty and significance. In order to really understand and appreciate myths one ought to let one’s scientific methods of analysis to be curbed. Poetry, being subjective, can be read in, many ways by different readers, increasing or decreasing in significance depending on the reader’s point

57. Ibid.
of view. Poems with the help of myth convey a reality where feelings are expressed as a series of images.

If the Western artists look to Freud, Jung, Frazer, Kafka, Camus, Greek mythology, Bible etc., in India, all the socio-psychological religious, moral, mode of conduct is found in the Vedas, Epics - Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Aranyakas, Smriti and Shruti etc. The Sages and Seers of India thought of every aspect of human life, mental, emotional and physical and provided him with guidance for the same. Manu's name keeps cropping up as far as social behaviour is concerned. Whatever be the myth, it has always centered round man and woman, relationship. Whatever be the apparent discord, each longs for other, and this longing leads to the origin, existence and continuity of the universe.

If in Sylvia Plath the socio-cultural and religious background is dominated by science and material affluence, in Kamala Das it is religion that pervades her socio-cultural life. Hinduism is the life breath of the Hindus and Kamala Das is no exception to it.