CONCLUSION

No work of research can be said to have a conclusion, since the debate on the given topic continues. Myth formation in the fiction of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh is not a closed debate after this thesis by any stretch of imagination. What we have tried to argue in this thesis is that myth formation is an important part of the literary politics of both the authors which constructs their worldview in the novels. By choosing two authors from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we have tried to look at the genre of myth in fiction and to what extent myths continue to function as important modality of cultural pedagogy. With the renewed interest in anthropology, totem and taboos post Freud, Malinowski and James Frazer, the Modernists used myths in their art forms to form a ritualistic order within the literary world that was used as a mythico-historical backdrop to the purported modern alienation and fragmentation. If the Anglo-American and European Modernists were using myths as a spatio-temporal statement on the mythopoetic past of their civilisation, the post-colonial writers use myth to construct the image of the natives with the intention of resistance. The colonial oppression, among other things, would have stereotyped the natives as the other to the 'cultured' white man. The post-colonial writers therefore have the political compulsion in mind, that is, to restore the balance of image building, though not all the post-colonial writers share the same literary activism. In fact, in the conclusion, it must be stressed that that the term post-colonial itself has a tendency to construct a grand narrative, putting all the post-colonial writers under the encompassing umbrella of similar politics. Not all post-colonial condition can be the same and not all authors within the same post-colonial history can have the same representative literary or artistic values. So caution must be exercised before we call an author "post-colonial".

The thesis has looked into the very conception of myth formation and the various stages in literary history where this has taken place. It has given a graphic outline of the
history of myth criticism, though in a short space, it cannot be said to have discussed the entire gamut of myth criticism. However, by looking at the various schools of myth criticism, from the classical to psychoanalytical, cultural and post-structuralism, the opening chapter has tried to give an outlining of the various critical perspectives from which myths have been looked at through centuries. A look at the difference between myth and ritual was necessary as the two terms are not identically implicative of the same meaning, though a part of a continuum. This part of the thesis has tried to argue that myths are more literary in origin but rituals are a more cognitive social practice that seeks to represent the cults mentioned in the myths through religious practices and order.

The thesis then has looked into the novels of Chinua Achebe to look into the issue of myth formation in his novels. Again, it must be stated that within the parameter of a thesis, it is not possible to discuss all the novels. That is why, we chose mainly the Igbo trilogy for our discussion, along with another later novel of Achebe - Anthills of Savannah. The thesis has tried to argue that Chinua Achebe uses myths to construct a post-colonial identity for his community, which the Africans in general, and the Igbos in particular, have been denied for centuries. The Africans have been stereotyped racially as the "uncultured", "cannibal", "black" and "non-human" race whose only identity is that they are violent, blood loving tribal people. This Eurocentric racism is countered by Achebe literally by portraying the native culture of his community. However, the thesis has shown that Achebe is not a unilinear representative of his culture; he problematises his narrative by showing the fissures and cracks within the cultural artefacts of his community, leading to violence and internal colonisation. The thesis has tried to argue that Achebe's art cannot be looked at from a singular perspective of literary activism that politically tries to reinstate Africa from racial stereotyping. Achebe's myth formation thereby becomes an important aspect of his art because it is through the reception of the myths by the Igbo community that Achebe is able to
discern the multi layered approach to the various cultural and social practises of his native community. The thesis has tried to bring to focus the bush as also the urban novels of Achebe, so that a rounder perspective can be drawn on the issue of myth formation in his novels. There is a timeline factor in this choice as the bush novels are mainly set in colonial Nigeria, whereas the urban novels like *No Longer at Ease* and *Anthills of Savannah* are set in post-colonial Nigeria. Apart from the political difference in the two time set up, there is also the issue of the rural-urban divide. The politics of myth formation differs because of these factors and this brings to focus Achebe's expanding focus in his art with movement of time.

After the discussion on Achebe, the thesis moves onto the novels of Amitav Ghosh. We chose mainly four novels for our discussion - the Ibis trilogy and *The Hungry Tide*. The latter is given more prominence in the discussions because the text has more scope in the area of our interest, that is, myth formation. Ghosh's literary politics mainly deals with identity formation, much like Achebe, but since he is dealing with different cultures to that of Achebe, the content becomes different. In *The Hungry Tide*, we have tried to argue that Piya is the "outsider", who shows signs of colonial ignorance by not knowing about the Bon Bibi myth. However, her politics cannot be said to have the aggressive aim of Othering, she may be not too knowledgeable about the rituals and myths of the tide country, but she is not derisive of the Other. If this novel is set in the contemporary timeline, the Ibis trilogy is Ghosh's look at history with respect to the Anglo-Chinese Opium War in the mid-nineteenth century. However, Ghosh chooses a comparatively untold story in the narrative of the Opium War. As it is, Opium War is something that is not a part of the mainstream historical discourse in India, less is the story about Indians who took part in it. Within this story is the narrative of how these characters deal with myths in their daily lives. The thesis, at this portion, has tried to argue how myths and rituals define the way characters look at their position in society. Whether it is Deeti's vision of a ship or Babu Nob Kissin's gender fluidity
in wanting to become a *Sakhi* and appropriate the femininity of Taramony to become a devotee of Lord Krishna, myths define the way the characters look at their self. The last chapter tries to merge the two authors in terms of a comparative analysis of the way they form myths in their fiction. The difference lies in the politics which the two authors seek to practise, one born into a post-colonial society, in need of challenging the Eurocentric discourse on the 'native', the other born into an independent nation that seeks to find new avenues of expression, even in its history.

While discussing on the topic of myth formation in the fiction of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh, we have tried, as far as practicable, to avoid a construction of grand narrative. The analysis in the given topic is not the last word and future researches can be conducted in this field. Like Piya, who decides to stay back in Sunderban to study local culture, mythology and history further, researchers can further delve into the topic and bring out new ideas and perspectives to contribute to the existing critical body of work in myth formation in the two authors. One aspect which we have not concentrated in this thesis is the school of ecocriticism that can be used for analysing myths and their social/environmental validation. Ecocriticism is a relatively new school of criticism that gained prominence with Rachel Carson's work *Silent Spring* (1962). The first critic who used the term ecocriticism in relation to literary criticism is William Rueckert in his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". Ecocriticism seeks to find a critical perspective in studying nature and environment through representative art forms and some may try and find prescriptive solutions to contemporary environmental problems through such art works which speak of conserving nature and its various manifestations.

Myths can be looked at from the ecocritical point of view, especially where the myths talk about stories of creation, nature and animals. One aspect of culture is man's relation with nature - in fact, there is a critical school of thought that puts nature as opposed to culture,
especially post the increase of urban settlement. Without going into the nature-culture binary, it can be observed that there is scope to relate self, society, nature and texts to study the pattern of relationship between man and his environment. Questions can be raised about the validity of the term 'nature', but let us first come into what can be done with myths in terms of ecocriticism. In Achebe for example, there are so many myths in his novels that deal with natural objects and environment which can be used to study the way members of the Igbo community look at nature. In Arrow of God, Ezeulu's son is reprimanded for killing a python. He is sent to the Church and converted to Christianity by Ezeulu himself to be a political negotiator between his community and the colonisers. However, Oduche kills the python because it is an anti-Christian symbol. The myth is that the royal python is not the deity of Umuaro, the village whose head priest is Ezeulu actually it belonged to the village Ezidemili, whose deity Idemili owns the royal python and hence it is not supposed to be killed. We have already analysed the feudal and patriarchal assumptions that are behind the formation of this myth. But, if we bring in the ecocritical school of thought, it might be possible to observe that the myth is operative to save environmental hazards by stopping indiscriminate killing of animal life. This is imperative to the continuation of the human race on earth, as we are all dependent on each other for ecological sustenance. Myths and rituals, though not indiscriminately, might be seen as the earliest documentation of nature conservation by relating human world and the animal world. This might be used as a starting point to critique the anthropocentric approach to literary criticism. Similarly in The Hungry Tide, the myth associated with Bon Bibi can be studied from the perspective of ecocriticism. If the human self is Bon Bibi, the protective deity of the mangrove forest, then Dakhhin Ray, the human manifestation of tiger, is the Other. However, from the ecocritical point of view, this might be looked as achieving something positive through the rule of fear. If the cultural psyche of the people can be appropriated to the belief that venturing into the forest would welcome the
wrath of Dakhin Ray, then people might in the first place be wary of entering the forest. Secondly, by installing the belief system surrounding Bon Bibi, people might be encouraged to take precautionary steps lest the chance meeting with a tiger happens. The myth, in this case, functions to avoid the man-tiger conflict by restricting the forest space as exclusive to the animal world, which is turn protects the forest from major ecological catastrophe.

However, the problematic side of ecocriticism is the very word 'nature'. The word nature does not only denote the opposite to human settlement, it also denotes human behaviour. Nature has been often used as a justification to further the project of patriarchy and to impose a hegemony in gender identity formation. For example, women as the 'passive', 'conformative' stereotype is a patriarchal assumption and that is justified under the term 'nature'. Sexuality is also an area where the word 'nature' is used to underline the heteronormative hegemony of society. In Things Fall Apart, Ikemefuna is sacrificed because it is deemed to be "natural". Obi is expelled from his native society, in No Longer at Ease, because it is "unnatural" to marry a woman who is an osu. In Sea of Poppies, Deeti is pushed towards the funeral pyre of her husband forcibly, making her consume alcohol and opium, because it is "natural" for a widow to become a Sati. Hence, from the perspective of myth formation and ritualistic practices, ecocriticism can be used to critique the way 'nature' has been abused by the existing power structures in society to perpetrate violence and gender related inequality. Mythology, in a general sense, seeks to be pro-establishment and use 'nature' as a tool to further the cause of strengthening patriarchy and feudalism, but ecocriticism can be used to critique this politics, thereby establishing a code by which mythology can be seen as narratives that both play a constructive as well as a negative role in defining human relationship with "nature".

It must be accepted that the above discussion on an ecocritical perspective on myth criticism is extremely rudimentary and rather inadequate. However, we have tried to give a
small lead into what can be the future course of discussion as far as myth formation in the fiction of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh goes. It is always worth a look at two authors from the same critical lens who belong to different cultures. This gives a wider sense of how cultures work in terms of social beliefs, art productions and aesthetic representations. Myth formation in fiction is a specialised area of research within the larger frame of myth formation in general. Myth formation constantly takes place in society, but to appropriate it and then form a secondary myth formation in fiction requires an approach that will discern the literary politics of the author. As Barthes has argued in the essay "Myth Today" in *Mythologies*, myth is a form of signification and as such, it has no specific timeline to denote that myths can be only ancient in origin. Myth is a part of a speech in so far as it is a part of a communication that bears meaning. Meaning is however signified by ideology, which Barthes calls as 'myth'. Since every cultural product produces a meaning based on an ideology, any cultural product can be put under the lens of mythological analysis. Based on this argument, a lot of cultural artefacts and contemporary cultural images can be analysed in terms of myths. Fiction, or for that matter any form of art, is a cultural product that produces meaning through ideological intervention. It is the ideological strata that shapes the way meaning is constructed by a given receiver of that signification. So myth formation is an important aspect of modern criticism that can study the various ideological constructions that goes in the way of producing meaning of an artefact. The thesis has specifically looked into the art of Chinua Achebe and Amitav Ghosh for myth formation, but it is definitely possible that other authors can be studied, keeping this critical perspective in mind. There are numerous other authors who directly interpret and re-interpret myths in their fiction or poetry or even in drama, but there are also others who keep constructing new myths in their works. So, the last word on this topic is yet to be said and the writer of this thesis will be more than
happy if new debates are opened in the area of myth formation in the works of different authors.