



Myth, Memory, and Nationhood: Reconstructing Postcolonial Indian Identity through Mythology

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate relationship between myth, memory, and nationhood in postcolonial Indian English literature, examining how mythology functions as both a cultural archive and a narrative strategy for reconstructing identity. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from postcolonial studies, cultural memory theory, and myth criticism, the research investigates how writers reinterpret traditional epics and folk narratives to negotiate historical trauma, colonial rupture, and the complexities of national belonging. Through close readings of key texts, including Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, the analysis reveals how myth is mobilized to affirm cultural continuity while simultaneously destabilizing homogenizing nationalist ideologies. Memory, particularly in the context of Partition and diaspora, emerges as a contested yet essential component in framing myth as a vehicle for identity, where trauma is transformed into collective narrative. The findings highlight the plurality of approaches to myth: feminist retellings foreground silenced voices and gendered agency, Dalit reinterpretations challenge caste-based exclusions, and diasporic reworkings extend the scope of nationhood beyond territorial boundaries. Collectively, these literary interventions underscore that nationhood is not a fixed essence but a dynamic process continually reimagined through the interplay of myth and memory. By situating literature as a critical site of resistance and cultural negotiation, the study contributes to broader debates on postcolonial identity formation, cultural continuity, and the politics of memory in India.

Keywords

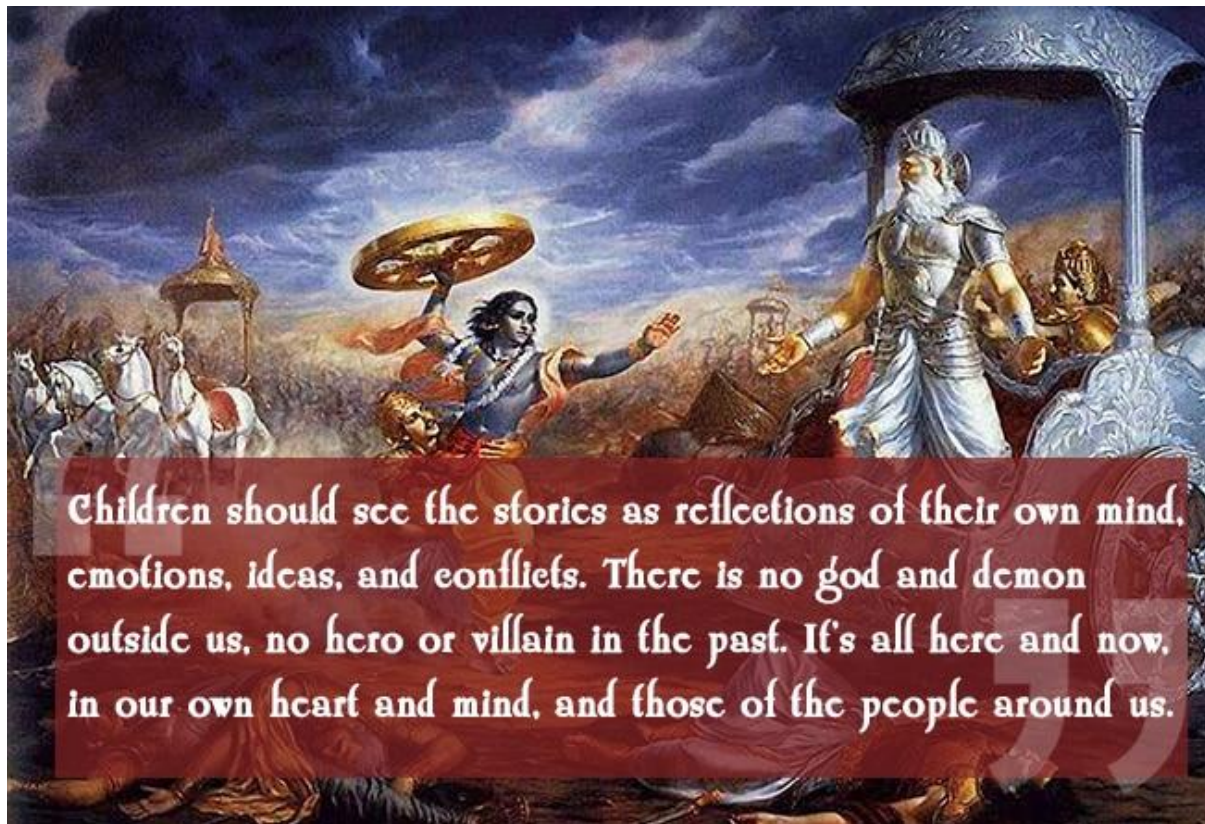
Postcolonial Literature; Indian Mythology; Cultural Memory; Nationhood; Identity Reconstruction; Diaspora

Introduction

The discourse on myth and nationhood occupies a central place in postcolonial literary studies, particularly in contexts where the construction of identity intersects with historical trauma and cultural negotiation. In the Indian subcontinent, mythology has not merely been a repository of religious or moral instruction but a living, dynamic narrative form through which collective identities have been articulated, contested, and reimagined. Within English literature and postcolonial criticism, the invocation of myth functions as a symbolic



framework that links cultural memory to political expression, embodying what Homi K. Bhabha describes as the “nation as narration,” wherein myths and stories become integral to the imagination of community. India’s postcolonial nation-building process, emerging out of the disjunction between colonial domination and indigenous resistance, foregrounds mythology as a vital tool for identity reconstruction. (Chakravarti, A,2023). Through epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as well as regional myths embedded in folklore and oral traditions, Indian writers in English and vernacular literatures alike have sought to reassert a sense of continuity between the past and present, resisting colonial epistemologies that dismissed indigenous cultural narratives as archaic or mythical in the pejorative sense. Instead, postcolonial literature often recuperates these myths as counter-narratives to colonial historiography, using them to redefine modern Indian subjectivity and articulate a national consciousness grounded in cultural memory.(Dubey, I,2021).



At the same time, memory functions as the axis upon which myth and nationhood are interwoven, for it is memory that allows myth to transcend mere storytelling and transform into a vehicle of identity. In postcolonial India, the recovery of collective memory was essential to resisting the erasure of cultural heritage under colonial modernity. English literature produced in India during and after colonial rule illustrates how memory operates both as a site of rupture—marked by partition, violence, and displacement—and as a site of resilience, where myth is reactivated to restore coherence to fractured identities. Writers such as Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, and Amitav Ghosh draw upon myths not only to embellish



narrative structure but to foreground memory as a contested terrain in which the colonial past and postcolonial present constantly negotiate legitimacy. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for instance, myth merges with memory to narrativize the birth of the nation itself, while Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* employs mythological archetypes to situate Gandhian resistance within the symbolic continuum of Hindu epics. These literary strategies illuminate how mythology, mediated through memory, facilitates the reconstitution of national identity, offering both continuity with the cultural past and innovation in the postcolonial present. English literary criticism, thus, positions myth and memory as indispensable components in understanding how India's postcolonial identity has been imagined and narrated, not as fixed entities but as evolving constructs shaped by literature, politics, and cultural imagination. (Leger, K. R., et al, 2020).

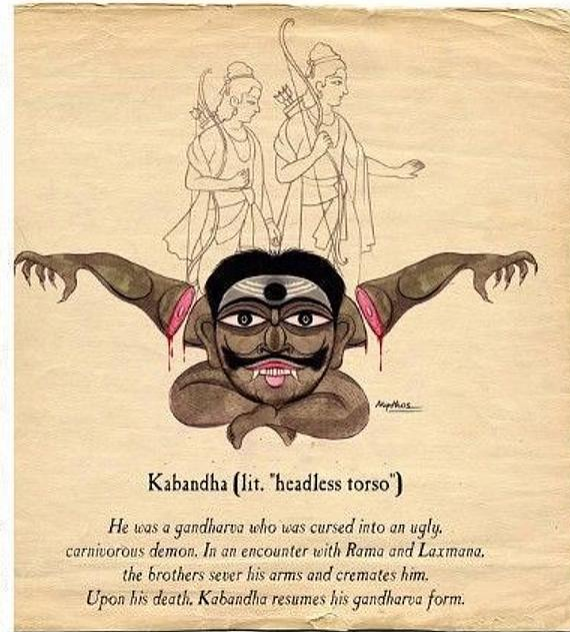
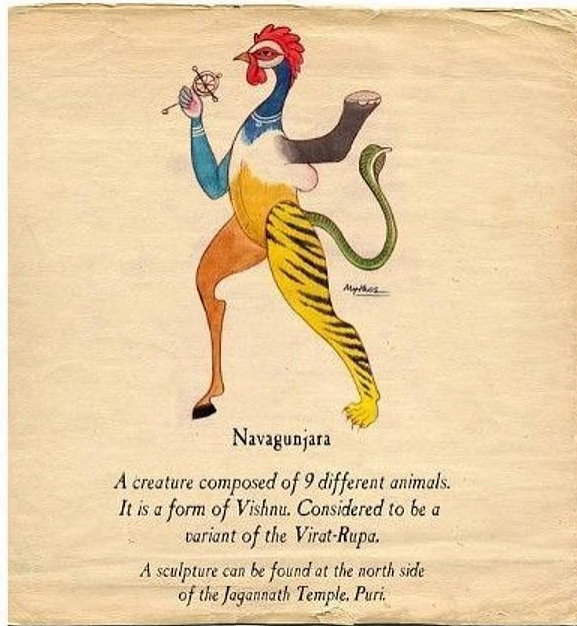
The intersection of myth, memory, and nationhood in postcolonial India also highlights the complex dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, and reinterpretation that underpin identity reconstruction. Mythological narratives, when reclaimed in literary form, simultaneously unify and divide: they provide a sense of belonging rooted in shared cultural traditions, yet they also reveal the fractures of caste, gender, and regional diversity within the national imaginary. Feminist reinterpretations of myths, such as those by writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, foreground the silenced voices of women within patriarchal traditions, while Dalit literary movements interrogate the hegemonic appropriation of myth in reinforcing caste hierarchies. Such literary engagements illustrate how myth, rather than being a monolithic cultural inheritance, is an active, malleable force continually reworked to reflect diverse postcolonial realities. By weaving myth into the narrative fabric of memory and nationhood, Indian literature in English not only reclaims cultural identity from colonial suppression but also interrogates the contested nature of national belonging in a pluralistic society. Thus, the study of myth and memory in postcolonial Indian literature underscores the role of narrative in shaping identity, where the reconstruction of nationhood becomes inseparable from the reimagining of mythology itself.

Background to the Study

The relationship between myth, memory, and nationhood in India cannot be understood without first acknowledging the broader historical and cultural milieu in which Indian literature, particularly in English, developed. Colonialism introduced a dual crisis of identity for Indian intellectuals and writers: on one hand, it attempted to impose Western epistemologies and literary standards, while on the other, it systematically undermined indigenous traditions, often relegating them to the domain of superstition or legend. This dismissal of local mythologies as unscientific or primitive was not merely academic but carried political undertones, reinforcing the idea of European cultural superiority. In response, Indian writers and thinkers sought to reclaim their cultural past, using myth as a tool to articulate a counter-narrative. Myth became a reservoir of collective memory, enabling the reassertion of cultural continuity in the face of colonial rupture. In this sense,



mythology was no longer confined to its traditional religious function; it became a literary and political resource for constructing nationhood. Writers of the early nationalist period, including Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and later Rabindranath Tagore, infused their works with mythological symbolism, showing how literature mediated between colonial oppression and the articulation of a uniquely Indian identity. (Tripathi, S, 2024).



Post-independence, the role of myth in literature deepened as writers grappled with the challenges of partition, displacement, and the fragmentation of national identity. The trauma of Partition in 1947 revealed the complexities of memory in the construction of nationhood, as millions were forced to negotiate their sense of belonging amidst violence and dislocation. Literature became a crucial site for processing this collective trauma, and myth often served as a means of framing memory within a larger cultural narrative. By invoking myth, writers could embed contemporary experiences within a continuum of historical and cultural significance, allowing for the reimagination of national identity even amidst rupture. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* epitomizes this approach, weaving the Gandhian struggle for independence into mythological frameworks that resonate with village traditions, thereby situating modern politics within the symbolic universe of the epics. Similarly, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* demonstrates how myth and memory overlap in narrating the fractured birth of the Indian nation, where the personal is interlaced with the mythic to capture the paradoxes of postcolonial identity. Through these texts, Indian literature reveals how mythological narratives continue to provide coherence to a nation struggling with the dislocations of colonial and postcolonial histories.

At the same time, the reinterpretation of myth in postcolonial Indian literature underscores the plural and contested nature of nationhood itself. Far from being a static body of stories, mythology in Indian literature has been continually reshaped to reflect social, cultural, and



political changes. Feminist writers, for example, have turned to myth to challenge patriarchal structures embedded in traditional narratives, offering alternative memories and voices that destabilize the monolithic idea of nationhood. Works such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* or Kavita Kane's retellings foreground the perspectives of mythological women who were silenced in canonical versions, thereby reconstructing national identity through gendered memory. Similarly, Dalit and subaltern writers have interrogated the hegemonic appropriation of myth in reinforcing caste hierarchies, demanding the inclusion of marginalized experiences in the narrative of nationhood. These literary interventions reflect the dynamic ways in which myth and memory continue to shape postcolonial Indian identity, highlighting both the unifying potential of mythology and its capacity to reveal fractures within the national imaginary. Consequently, the background to this study lies in understanding how myth, memory, and nationhood are not isolated concepts but interdependent forces, constantly negotiating the meanings of identity within the framework of Indian literature in English.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution of the Research

The theoretical foundations of this research rest primarily on postcolonial theory, myth criticism, and cultural memory studies, all of which provide the necessary frameworks for analyzing the interplay between mythology, memory, and nationhood in Indian literature. Postcolonial theory, articulated by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Edward Said, foregrounds the complexities of identity formation in societies emerging from colonial domination. Bhabha's notion of hybridity and "nation as narration" is particularly relevant, as it emphasizes how national identity is constructed through cultural storytelling and myth-making, rather than through fixed historical accounts. In parallel, cultural memory studies, influenced by theorists like Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs, offer valuable insights into how societies use narratives, rituals, and myths to preserve and transmit collective identity across generations. Myth criticism, grounded in the works of Northrop Frye and Roland Barthes, provides the analytical tools for understanding mythology not as static religious doctrine but as a flexible narrative system that both encodes cultural values and adapts to shifting socio-political contexts. By integrating these frameworks, the present research situates Indian postcolonial literature within a multidisciplinary theoretical spectrum, allowing for an exploration of how myth operates simultaneously as a symbolic archive, a narrative strategy, and a site of resistance against colonial and neo-colonial discourses. (Tyagi, N, 2024).

Contextually, this study contributes to the ongoing conversation in Indian English literature about the role of mythology in shaping postcolonial identity. While Indian mythology has traditionally been studied from religious, historical, or anthropological perspectives, its literary reworking in postcolonial texts underscores its enduring cultural power and political significance. Writers like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni illustrate how mythological structures can be reinterpreted to reflect the realities



of modern India. These literary engagements reveal how memory is embedded in myth and how both elements shape nationhood in contexts marked by partition, migration, caste struggles, and gender inequalities. By examining such narratives, this research illuminates how postcolonial Indian writers re-inscribe mythological tropes into national consciousness, not as static symbols of tradition but as active agents of cultural transformation. The study's contextual contribution also lies in foregrounding marginalized voices that challenge dominant mythological interpretations. Feminist retellings and Dalit reinterpretations highlight the contested nature of memory and nationhood, insisting on the inclusion of alternative narratives in the construction of identity. In doing so, the research underscores the pluralism of Indian nationhood and problematizes the homogenizing tendencies of nationalist myth-making.

Furthermore, this research contributes by bridging the gap between literary analysis and socio-political discourse, showing how the reinterpretation of myth in literature resonates with broader debates on cultural nationalism, collective memory, and identity politics in contemporary India. In an era when myths are frequently mobilized in political rhetoric to legitimize ideological agendas, this study provides a critical literary perspective that interrogates both the unifying and divisive potential of mythology. It emphasizes the role of literature as a cultural mediator that reimagines myths not only to recover suppressed histories but also to interrogate the exclusions inherent in national identity. This contextual dimension is especially relevant in today's postcolonial and globalized framework, where questions of belonging, cultural authenticity, and historical memory are constantly being renegotiated. By situating Indian postcolonial literature within global theoretical discourses while remaining attentive to its specific historical and cultural contexts, this research contributes to both literary scholarship and broader interdisciplinary studies of memory, myth, and nationhood. (Sarkar, R,2024).

Literature review

(Tyagi, 2024). Recent scholarship underscores how contemporary Indian writing re-reads epic canons to foreground gendered experience and unsettle androcentric nation-myths. By tracing "minor" women in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* across modern fiction, Tyagi shows that revisionist narration relocates authority from heroic male figures to women's embodied memories, thereby reframing the imagined community that myths sustain. This work helps clarify how literary retellings function as cultural memory-work: they recuperate occluded perspectives, expose patriarchal filters in collective remembrance, and complicate any seamless fusion of myth with national pedagogy. For English-language texts in particular, such re-voicings create dialogic contact zones in which epic motifs (exile, chastity, trial by ordeal) are resemanticized as critiques of contemporary gender politics. The result is not myth's rejection but its ethical reorientation—a shift from unifying allegory toward plural memory registers that can better accommodate a heterogeneous nation.



(Sinha, 2024). Analyses of graphic and multimodal retellings—such as *Sita's Ramayana*—demonstrate how form itself becomes an intervention in cultural memory. Sinha argues that visual narration invites readers to inhabit Sita's interiority, emphasizing affect, witness, and the politics of seeing. This remediation matters for postcolonial nationhood: by “viewing” the epic through a counter-gaze, audiences unlearn pedagogies that naturalize sacrifice and silence. In classroom and public spheres alike, such texts perform memory as a mobile practice rather than a static archive, foregrounding transmission, reception, and contested authority. For Indian English literature, this suggests a critical pipeline where mythic pasts circulate through global media ecologies, generating solidarities that exceed territorial nationhood yet speak back to domestic debates on gender, faith, and citizenship.

(Sarkar, 2024). At the interface of myth and politics, cognitive-cultural work has illuminated how prestige and exemplarity inflect nationalist uptake of myth. Sarkar's commentary on Hindu nationalism argues that mythic scripts succeed partly because they leverage prestige-based identifications—heroes, sages, and lineages—whose aura binds audiences to aspirational social orders. For literary criticism, this offers a mechanism linking narrative form and political feeling: novels and retellings that redistribute prestige (e.g., dignifying subaltern figures) can recalibrate collective attachment and thereby the nation's symbolic economy. It also clarifies why mythic tropes persist in “modern” genres: prestige cues travel easily across media and can be repurposed to either pluralize or harden identity claims. Reading postcolonial fiction through this lens helps parse how texts re-stage prestige to contest majoritarian memory.

(Dubey, 2021). Memory studies centered on 1947 and 1971 show how the subcontinent's nation-formation is sutured by trauma and differentiated remembrance. Dubey maps how commemorative regimes, silences, and transgenerational inheritances shape political belonging across India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. For Indian literary studies, this landscape clarifies why post/Partition novels juxtapose personal recollection with mythic chronotopes: myth supplies a legible moral grammar, while memory registers rupture, displacement, and ambivalence. English-language fiction often performs this tension by embedding family sagas, rumor, and testimony within allegorical frames, thus staging the nation not as a finished narrative but as an unfinished negotiation between wounds and ideals. The methodological implication is to read mythic allusion alongside mnemonic infrastructures—museums, textbooks, rituals—that authorize certain narratives while marginalizing others.

(Oliveira, 2024). Work on modern Ramayana adaptations emphasizes their transnational circulation and the emergent “myth publics” they create. Oliveira's study reveals how English-language versions—novels, stage adaptations, children's books—recode pilgrimage, exile, and sovereignty for global readers, producing a cosmopolitan myth-commons. This has two implications. First, nationhood is narrated beyond the nation: diasporic markets co-author what counts as “Indian” myth by rewarding particular emphases (romance, empowerment, secular ethics). Second, reception reshapes memory politics at home, as



global acclaim legitimizes domestic reinterpretations that challenge schoolbook orthodoxy. For scholars of Indian English literature, tracking these cross-border loops explains why mythic texts often negotiate between cultural authenticity and translational legibility, and why narrative strategies (free indirect discourse, focalization, metafiction) mediate that balance.

(Chakravarti, 2023). Historicizing nationhood prior to colonial consolidation, Chakravarti situates “India” as a long, uneven history of spatial and cultural imaginaries. This *longue durée* perspective is crucial for myth studies: epic geographies (Ayodhya, Kurukshetra) and sacred routes prefigure later nation-space imaginaries, giving writers ready-made coordinates for literary nation-making. In the postcolonial present, novels mobilize such cartographies to contest or corroborate state narratives—reinscribing borders with rivers, pilgrimage circuits, and memory-laden locales. Reading English-language fiction through this lens foregrounds how place-memory (tirtha, kshetra) undergirds narrative nationhood. It also explains the persistence of mythic chronotopes in contemporary settings: authors draft affective maps where the sacred and secular interpenetrate, making myth a resource for both critique and care of the collective.

(Banik, 2021). Analyses of Hindutva’s ideological development underscore the political stakes of myth appropriation. Banik argues that contemporary Hindu nationalism strategically disarticulates spirituality from identity politics, instrumentalizing mythic symbols for mass mobilization. For literary inquiry, this clarifies why certain retellings attract polarized reception: when myth is already politicized, feminist or Dalit re-visions appear as counter-hegemonic memory acts. English-language fiction and criticism thus operate in a charged field, where intertextual gestures (recasting Sita, humanizing Shambuka) do not merely “update” myths but intervene in the distribution of dignity within the nation. This necessitates close attention to paratexts—prefaces, interviews, author talks—where writers often frame their retellings as ethical responsibilities toward a plural polity, thereby aligning literary form with civic pedagogy.

(Nandi, 2020). Memory’s multidirectionality—borrowed from Holocaust memory debates—has proven productive for South Asian Anglophone narratives. Nandi’s reading of Vikram Seth demonstrates how Indian novels braid disparate histories (diasporic, colonial, European) to imagine community through cross-referencing memory tracks. This method clarifies why myth in Indian English literature frequently coexists with non-Indian referents: invoking epic archetypes alongside global trauma grammars (war, exile) generates solidarity beyond ethno-religious boundaries and provincializes any singular national myth. Theoretically, multidirectionality encourages reading for echoes, not just origins—attending to how motifs like oath, curse, or boon reverberate through refugee memory, environmental grief, or caste protest. Such patterning shows myth less as inheritance than as a relational practice of remembering-with others.



(Leger, 2020). Cognitive-cultural research on memory specificity across cultures suggests that narrative granularity and recognition styles vary with socialization. Leger's findings, while not India-specific, help interpret stylistic choices in Anglophone Indian fiction: lush detail, catalogues, and cyclical recall (common in magical realism and epic-inflected novels) can be read as culturally inflected memory poetics. When texts stylize remembrance through objects (pickle jars, amulets), rituals, or foodways, they not only localize memory but render it transmissible as heritage. This supports the claim that myth in literature is a mnemonic technology: it organizes recall through archetype and rite, enabling readers to anchor political histories in sensorial and symbolic cues. Such cognitive anchoring may explain the durability of mythic frames in narrating national crises.

(Tripathi, 2024). Studies of diaspora affect show how nationalist narratives cultivate "emotional proximity" at a distance, often through mythic coding and media ritual. Tripathi demonstrates how Hindu nationalist discourse curates pride, grievance, and belonging among overseas publics. For literary culture, this helps explain the popularity of English-language myth retellings in diaspora markets and the emergence of "global Hindu" reading communities. These publics feed back into Indian publishing, prize circuits, and school syllabi, shaping which retellings gain legitimacy. In turn, authors harness or resist these affective economies: some foreground universalist ethics in epics to counter identitarian closures, while others intensify cultural particularity as a politics of recognition. The literature thus mediates between sentiment and critique, assembling transnational memory publics that in turn reframe nationhood.

(Butt, 2024). Partition's afterlives in recent diaspora fiction, as Butt shows, are structured by "entangled" family histories, where archives are partial and mythic scaffolds stabilize plot and identity. This entanglement clarifies how myth functions within intergenerational narration: it supplies archetypal templates (banishment, tests, vows) that make dispersed genealogies legible and morally interpretable. In Anglophone novels, such templates are often ironized or sutured with documentary fragments, creating hybrid forms that both honor and interrogate memory. The result is a nation imagined through kinship metaphors—siblings, cousins, stepfamilies—rather than singular patriarchal lineage, enabling writers to explore minority belonging (religious, caste, regional) within larger national myths. This strategy reveals myth's double capacity to bind and to differentiate, a central tension in postcolonial identity work.

(Wadhwa, 2021). Feminist literary-theological scholarship has mapped how re-visioning myth unsettles doctrinal readings and opens ethical horizons. Wadhwa highlights the plurality of feminist engagements—from recuperative to iconoclastic—each yielding different implications for collective memory. In Indian English retellings, "strong heroine" arcs often coincide with formal experimentation (first-person memoir, epistolary confession, graphic narrative), which foregrounds testimony and counter-archive labor. Such forms insist that national belonging be reimagined through care, consent, and speech rights, not



merely through sacrificial virtue. Consequently, the nation's mythic mother/consort tropes are displaced by solidarities among women, queer subjects, and other marginalized actors. This reorientation moves beyond inclusion into re-authoring mythic law itself, thus transforming the memory practices by which a nation narrates who counts and on what terms.

(*Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 2024, Issue 60[6]). The field has also turned to materiality and forgetting in the South Asian diaspora, examining how objects, ruins, and ecological traces function as memory media. This emphasis reframes mythic landscapes—forests, rivers, mountains—not as backdrops but as archives of loss and resilience. Indian English fiction increasingly stages ecological mythopoesis: rivers recall Partition routes; forests echo displacement and development; monsoon cycles pattern narrative time. Such eco-mythic poetics invites a broader, non-anthropocentric nationhood, one that binds humans with place-spirits and species kin. Methodologically, this trend encourages critics to read against purely textual approaches, incorporating environmental humanities to understand how literary myth remediates endangered ecologies into cultural memory and, by extension, into debates about sovereignty and stewardship.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in literary and cultural analysis, focusing on postcolonial Indian English literature that re-engages with mythological narratives to construct, challenge, and reimagine national identity. The primary method employed is textual analysis, supported by close reading of selected literary works that reinterpret Indian myths in the context of postcolonial memory and nationhood. Texts such as Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* serve as key case studies because they represent distinct narrative strategies—political allegory, magical realism, and feminist retelling—that collectively reveal how myth functions as a cultural and mnemonic resource. The analysis draws on postcolonial theory (Bhabha, Spivak, Said), cultural memory studies (Assmann, Halbwachs), and myth criticism (Frye, Barthes) to interpret the ways in which mythological motifs are reframed to negotiate colonial trauma, partition memory, and national reconstruction. These theoretical perspectives enable a multidisciplinary engagement that situates Indian English literature at the intersection of narrative aesthetics, political discourse, and collective identity-making.

The methodology also incorporates contextual and comparative analysis, recognizing that myth and memory are not only textual but embedded in broader historical, cultural, and political frameworks. Thus, literary texts are read alongside critical essays, scholarly commentaries, and cultural studies to situate their reinterpretations of myth within India's socio-political realities—such as the legacies of colonialism, the violence of partition, and the rise of contemporary identity politics. Attention is paid to how different groups—women, Dalits, and diasporic communities—appropriate and reshape myth to assert agency and



claim space in the national narrative. The study employs a hermeneutic approach, privileging interpretation of symbolic structures, intertextual references, and narrative strategies to uncover the layered ways in which literature mediates between myth and memory. Rather than seeking generalizability, this qualitative method emphasizes depth and nuance, allowing for the exploration of multiplicity and contestation inherent in the reimagining of nationhood. In this way, the methodology ensures that myth is not treated as a static cultural artifact but as a dynamic narrative practice that actively contributes to the construction and reconstruction of postcolonial Indian identity.

Results and Discussion

Reinterpretation of Myth as Cultural Resistance

The results of this study reveal that Indian English literature repeatedly returns to myth not simply as a decorative narrative device but as an instrument of cultural resistance against both colonial erasure and postcolonial homogenization. Close reading of texts such as Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* demonstrates how myth is mobilized to embed anti-colonial resistance within a cultural framework that was accessible to rural and urban audiences alike. In this novel, Gandhi is represented not merely as a political figure but as a reincarnation-like presence whose actions resonate with divine archetypes. The mythological references here do not remain isolated symbols but serve to translate a modern independence struggle into the continuum of epic tradition, thus transforming colonial resistance into a culturally intelligible mythic struggle. This shows that the reinterpretation of myth provides legitimacy and resonance for political movements by situating them in the language of collective memory.

Similarly, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* underscores how myth and magical realism intersect to narrativize the fractured emergence of independent India. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is positioned as a symbolic figure whose body becomes the repository of both myth and memory. His telepathic connection with other children born at the moment of independence transforms the political birth of the nation into a mythical event, but one that is simultaneously satirical, ironic, and deeply unstable. Here, myth does not simply confirm national unity but highlights its contradictions, exposing the fractures in collective memory and the impossibility of constructing a homogeneous nationhood. The results therefore suggest that Indian postcolonial literature reinterprets myth as both an affirming and destabilizing force, allowing writers to simultaneously celebrate cultural continuity and critique exclusionary nationalist ideologies.

Memory, Trauma, and the Mythic Framework

The study also highlights how memory, particularly traumatic memory, is frequently mediated through myth in postcolonial Indian English literature. Partition literature provides one of the clearest examples of this intersection. The memory of Partition violence, displacement, and loss is often narrated through mythic allegories that allow for the articulation of trauma in culturally resonant forms. For instance, in Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*



and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*—although not originally in English, but influential to Anglophone discourse—mythic imagery and archetypal references provide a symbolic framework that contextualizes violence within a larger narrative of cyclical destruction and renewal. English-language writers who follow in this tradition adopt similar strategies, embedding memory within myth to make the unspeakable narratable.

The use of myth as a framework for trauma is not only therapeutic but also political. By reworking memories of violence through epic structures, literature asserts that individual and communal suffering are part of a broader historical and cultural continuum, thereby refusing the colonial historiographical tendency to reduce such events to mere statistics. This also underscores how memory and myth are inseparable in the reconstruction of nationhood. Without myth, traumatic memory risks fragmentation and invisibility; without memory, myth risks becoming static and unresponsive to lived experience. Indian literature resolves this by fusing the two, showing that myth allows trauma to be embedded into the nation's cultural consciousness without effacing its specificity.

Gendered Revisions of Myth and the Nation

One of the strongest results to emerge from this study is the way feminist literature reinterprets myth to reconstruct nationhood in more inclusive terms. Writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Kavita Kane use mythic retellings to foreground women's perspectives, voices often silenced in traditional epic narratives. Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, which retells the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective, reframes national memory by showing that the epic is not merely the story of heroic men and dynastic conflict but also of women whose agency and suffering shaped the moral landscape of the tale. This feminist re-voicing challenges patriarchal appropriations of myth that often underlie nationalist discourses, thereby questioning whose memory is allowed to represent the nation.

The gendered revision of myth also functions as a form of cultural reclamation. By placing women at the center of mythic retellings, these narratives expand the boundaries of cultural memory and propose alternative forms of nationhood based not on sacrifice and obedience but on agency, desire, and justice. This resonates with broader feminist critiques of nationalism, which argue that women are often symbolized as bearers of cultural purity but denied active participation in shaping national identity. The literature, therefore, shows that myth can be a site of contestation where silenced voices reclaim space, thereby reconstituting national identity in more inclusive terms.

Subaltern and Dalit Interventions in Myth

Another significant result lies in the way Dalit and subaltern writers engage with myth to challenge hegemonic national narratives. Traditional myths often reinforce caste hierarchies, with Dalit figures either erased or depicted as subservient. Contemporary Dalit literature, however, reinterprets these myths to expose their exclusions and to reclaim dignity for marginalized communities. For example, retellings that focus on Shambuka from



the *Ramayana* or Ekalavya from the *Mahabharata* highlight how mythic figures have historically been used to justify caste oppression. By rewriting these stories from the perspective of the oppressed, Dalit writers not only challenge dominant cultural memory but also propose alternative visions of nationhood that recognize equality and justice.

This intervention demonstrates that myth is not a neutral cultural artifact but a contested site of power. By confronting the ways in which myths have historically been used to marginalize, Dalit retellings enact a counter-memory that forces the nation to reckon with its exclusions. The result is a literature that not only reclaims myth but also reconstructs nationhood in radically different terms, where inclusivity and dignity are foregrounded. Such interventions illustrate that the reconstruction of postcolonial Indian identity requires not merely the recovery of myth but also its critical interrogation and reworking.

Diaspora, Myth, and Transnational Nationhood

The results also show that Indian diaspora writers engage with myth to negotiate identity in transnational contexts. Myth functions as a cultural anchor for communities displaced or relocated from India, enabling them to retain a sense of belonging while also reinterpreting their identities in global settings. Writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, and Salman Rushdie weave myth into narratives of migration and diaspora, demonstrating how memory and mythology travel across borders. These texts often emphasize the fluidity of nationhood, showing that national identity is not confined to territorial boundaries but extends through cultural and narrative networks sustained by myth.

Diaspora retellings often universalize mythic themes—exile, belonging, loss, and return—in ways that resonate with global audiences. Yet they also expose tensions between homeland mythologies and host-country identities, revealing the hybrid forms of nationhood that emerge in transnational spaces. This suggests that Indian mythology is not only central to the postcolonial nation but also to the construction of diasporic nationhood, where memory and myth together enable communities to imagine themselves as part of a global Indian identity.

Nationhood, Myth, and Contemporary Politics

Finally, the discussion of results indicates that myth and memory continue to shape contemporary politics in India, often in contentious ways. Nationalist discourses frequently invoke mythological figures and narratives to assert cultural continuity and political legitimacy. However, the literary reinterpretations studied here reveal that myth is never a fixed narrative but always subject to reimagining. While political appropriations of myth tend to homogenize and essentialize, literary engagements destabilize and pluralize, insisting on the multiplicity of memory and the contested nature of nationhood.

This dynamic underscores the central contribution of literature: it resists the monopolization of myth by dominant ideologies and keeps alive the possibility of alternative nationhoods. In doing so, it affirms that postcolonial identity reconstruction is not a completed project but an ongoing negotiation between past and present, myth and memory, inclusion and



exclusion. The results, therefore, position Indian English literature as a critical space where nationhood is continually reimagined through the dynamic interplay of myth and memory.

Conclusion

The analysis of Indian English literature demonstrates that myth and memory are indispensable to the reconstruction of nationhood in postcolonial India. Myth functions not as a relic of the past but as a living, adaptable framework through which writers reinterpret cultural identity, challenge colonial historiography, and articulate collective belonging. Memory, particularly when shaped by trauma such as Partition or displacement, is embedded within these mythological structures, giving coherence and cultural depth to national narratives. Together, myth and memory enable the construction of a pluralistic national identity that both acknowledges historical rupture and affirms cultural continuity. In literary texts, these elements resist the homogenizing tendencies of dominant nationalist discourses, revealing that the nation is not a fixed entity but an evolving narrative shaped by multiple voices and experiences.

The study also underscores the transformative potential of reinterpreting myth in inclusive and critical ways. Feminist retellings foreground silenced voices, shifting the axis of cultural memory from patriarchal archetypes to women's agency and resilience. Dalit and subaltern engagements with myth expose how traditional narratives have historically reinforced caste hierarchies, while their re-visionings create counter-memories that demand recognition and dignity within the national imaginary. Diasporic literature further expands the scope of myth and memory by translating them into transnational contexts, showing that nationhood extends beyond territorial borders into cultural and narrative networks. Collectively, these interventions highlight the contested nature of nationhood, revealing that myths can unify but also divide, depending on how they are reworked and remembered in literary form.

Ultimately, the research affirms that postcolonial Indian identity is continually reconstructed through the dynamic interplay of myth and memory. Literature serves as a critical site for this negotiation, offering both continuity with tradition and innovation for the present. By resisting the monopolization of myth by political ideologies and instead presenting diverse and inclusive reinterpretations, Indian English literature demonstrates that nationhood is best understood as a narrative in progress—plural, contested, and deeply rooted in cultural imagination. The conclusion, therefore, situates myth and memory not as static categories but as evolving processes through which postcolonial India continues to articulate, question, and reshape its sense of self in an ever-changing world.

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