

From Sacred Narrative to Negotiated Narrative: Reimagining Mythology in Contemporary Fiction

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Abstract

Contemporary mythological fiction revisits inherited narratives by transforming familiar characters, reworking episodes, and foregrounding perspectives that have received limited attention in earlier tellings. This paper examines how selected works of contemporary Indian and global fiction negotiate mythological traditions through changes in characterization, narrative structure, and moral emphasis. Using a qualitative comparative textual approach, the study considers eleven novels: Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* and *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*; Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*; Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key*; Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*; Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*; Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*; Joanne Harris's *The Gospel of Loki*; and Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*. The analysis is organized around three dimensions: degree of narrative transformation, contemporary social relevance, and narrative perspective. It asks how these works revise inherited representations of heroism, villainy, gender, authority, identity, and marginalization. The paper argues that mythological retellings create interpretive space between inherited narratives and contemporary concerns; however, a change in narrator or characterization does not automatically dismantle the social and ideological structures represented in a story. The cultural and moral significance of these novels is therefore approached as a textual possibility rather than a demonstrated effect on readers.

Keywords: mythological retellings; negotiated narrative; narrative transformation; counter-narrative; narrative agency; cultural memory; moral ambiguity; contemporary fiction.

1. Introduction

Myths are culturally situated narratives through which communities explore questions of origin, identity, morality, social order, and human experience. They circulate through oral traditions, religious practices, literary works, performance, and popular culture. Their meanings are not necessarily uniform or permanently fixed: different tellers and interpretive communities may emphasize different characters, events, values, and experiences. Contemporary literary retellings participate in this ongoing process by revisiting familiar stories and making their assumptions available for renewed scrutiny.

A retelling may alter the characterization of a familiar figure, expand an episode that earlier narratives treated briefly, relocate narrative authority, or reinterpret the moral significance of an event. A character conventionally positioned as an antagonist may be given motives and a history; a woman previously represented primarily in relation to male heroes may become the centre of narration; or an inherited

myth may be recast through the conventions of the thriller, historical novel, or psychological narrative. Such strategies do not simply add new information. They can change the terms through which readers are invited to understand agency, responsibility, violence, and justice.

Contemporary Indian fiction provides several examples of this process. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* reconstructs the Ramayana world through perspectives associated with Ravana and Bhadra, while Ajaya: *Roll of the Dice* revisits the Mahabharata from positions that complicate conventional heroic alignments. Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* reimagines Shiva within a fictionalized, rationalized narrative world. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* places Draupadi's perspective at the centre of a retelling of the Mahabharata, while Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* combines mythological references with the structure of a contemporary thriller.

Comparable acts of revision occur in global fiction. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* revisits the Odyssey through Penelope and the maids; Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* foregrounds the experiences of women in the Trojan War; Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and Circe reconstruct Greek myth through intimate and character-centred narratives; Joanne Harris's *The Gospel of Loki* reworks Norse mythology through Loki's voice; and Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne* reconsiders the Cretan myth from a woman's perspective. These works differ in cultural context, genre, and relation to their source traditions, but they offer a productive basis for comparative analysis.

This study asks not whether contemporary retellings simply replace older narratives, but how they negotiate with inherited material. It focuses on three analytical dimensions: the degree of narrative transformation, contemporary social relevance, and narrative perspective. These dimensions make it possible to compare changes in plot and characterization, the social concerns brought into focus, and the distribution of narrative authority. The paper argues that contemporary retellings create space for competing interpretations of cultural memory and moral authority, while also recognizing that revised narratives may retain some of the constraints they appear to challenge.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How do the selected novels transform characters, episodes, narrative structures, and moral frameworks inherited from mythological traditions?
2. How do the novels engage with contemporary concerns such as gender, caste, power, identity, violence, and marginalization, where relevant to each text?
3. How does narrative perspective influence the representation of heroes, antagonists, and characters positioned at the margins of inherited narratives?
4. Where do these retellings challenge inherited moral and cultural assumptions, and where might they continue to reproduce ideological constraints?

1.2 Objectives

1. To identify and compare principal forms of narrative transformation in the selected novels.
2. To examine how the novels connect mythological material with contemporary social and cultural concerns.
3. To analyze the role of narrative voice and perspective in shaping agency, visibility, and moral judgment.
4. To assess both the interpretive possibilities and the limitations of mythological retellings across the selected corpus.

2. Review of Literature

Scholarship on contemporary mythological fiction commonly examines the relationship between inherited narrative material and modern social concerns. The studies cited in the original draft address gender, caste, narrative voice, historical memory, and the modernization of myth. Read together, they suggest that reinterpretation operates at more than one level: it may change the character through whom a story is told, alter the treatment of a familiar episode, or connect mythological material with concerns such as migration, environmental crisis, and social hierarchy.

2.1 Narrative Reinterpretation and Social Order

Rustam's study of the major works of Githa Hariharan is cited in the original draft as a broad account of the relationship among myth, history, identity, and ideological authority. This line of inquiry is relevant because it treats reinterpretation as more than plot revision: a retelling can also reconsider the assumptions through which identity and social order are represented. The full bibliographic details and the precise scope of Rustam's argument should be checked against the original publication before submission.

Rathod's study of Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife* and *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* provides a more focused discussion of caste consciousness, gender, and discrimination. Rathod argues that Kane's treatment of Uruvi and Satyavati brings women's agency and caste-based hierarchy into view. Although these novels are not part of the present primary corpus, the study is relevant as contextual scholarship on contemporary Indian mythological revisionism. It should not, however, be treated as direct evidence for the analysis of the eleven novels considered here.

2.2 Narrative Form, Characterization, and Degree of Transformation

Gopi and Dhanam's discussion of Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* emphasizes historical rationalization, philosophical reinterpretation, and contemporary storytelling techniques. This provides a useful distinction between a retelling that changes the mode of presenting mythological material and one that substantially changes the ideological or moral structure of the story. The present paper adopts that distinction by asking what is retained, what is modified, and what interpretive effect follows from the change.

The study by Bavarava and Pandey on selected Sita retellings examines the movement from a largely idealized or relational characterization toward a more introspective subject. Although its primary texts differ from the novels in the present corpus, the article supports the broader observation that characterization and narrative authority are important sites of revision. The exact publication details are available through *The Scientific Temper* and should be used in the final Works Cited list.

Soni and Vyas's study of *The Palace of Illusions* is especially relevant to the relationship between narrative form and gender. Their analysis describes Draupadi's first-person narration as a redistribution of narrative authority, while also acknowledging that agency remains constrained by caste, marriage, and dynastic obligations. This qualification is important: a retelling may foreground a previously subordinated voice without presenting emancipation as complete.

2.3 Cultural and Moral Impact

Rustam (2016) examines how myth, history, and identity are connected in contemporary Indian fiction. The study suggests that mythological retellings can encourage readers to question established social values and moral beliefs. By presenting alternative interpretations of familiar stories, writers create space for discussions about identity, social hierarchy, and cultural authority.

Bavarava and Pandey (2026) explore how different retellings of Sita's story present her as a character with her own thoughts, choices, and experiences. These interpretations challenge the idea that there is only one fixed image of Sita. Similarly, Soni and Vyas (2026) discuss how *The Palace of Illusions* gives Draupadi a central narrative voice, making her experiences of gender-based injustice more visible. However, a stronger narrative voice does not necessarily remove the social restrictions faced by women within the story.

Rathod (2022) highlights how Kavita Kane's retellings bring caste discrimination and gender inequality into the discussion of epic narratives. Limbani (2023), through the study of *Gun Island*, extends this discussion by connecting folklore and history with migration and environmental crisis. These studies show that the cultural significance of mythological reinterpretation can extend beyond individual characters to wider social and historical concerns.

Ranjan and Singh (2025) further caution against viewing all mythological reinterpretations as completely progressive. Their discussion suggests that a retelling may question certain gender and sexuality norms while continuing to reflect aspects of patriarchal thinking. This indicates that the cultural and moral impact of a retelling depends on both the changes it introduces and the traditional beliefs it retains.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that contemporary mythological fiction creates opportunities to reconsider established ideas about morality, gender, caste, power, and identity. However, these works do not necessarily replace one fixed interpretation with another. Instead, they present alternative viewpoints and encourage a more critical understanding of inherited narratives. The present study builds on this understanding by examining how selected Indian and global contemporary novels use narrative transformation, social relevance, and narrator perspective to challenge, negotiate, or retain traditional cultural and moral values.

2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

The scholarship identified in the draft offers useful accounts of individual authors, characters, or themes, including gendered voice, caste consciousness, popular modernization, and the relationship between myth and history. These studies provide a context for the present research, but the current manuscript does not yet establish conclusively that no previous study has compared the same set of works or used a similar framework. The research gap should therefore be framed cautiously.

The proposed contribution is a structured comparison across eleven novels from Indian and global mythological fiction, using the same three analytical dimensions: degree of narrative transformation, contemporary social relevance, and narrative perspective. This approach enables comparison across different mythological traditions and literary genres without assuming that the works are culturally interchangeable. The study examines where similar narrative strategies appear, where they function differently, and where a shift in perspective does not necessarily remove inherited constraints. The originality claim should be finalized only after a more comprehensive search of scholarship on each primary novel and on comparative mythological retellings.

3. Methodology

This paper compares contemporary mythological retellings through qualitative textual analysis. Its selected corpus comprises eleven novels that revisit Indian, Greek, or Norse mythological material: Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* and *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*; Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*; Ashwin Sanghi's *The*

Krishna Key; Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*; Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*; Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*; Joanne Harris's *The Gospel of Loki*; and Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*. The available evidence is uneven across the eleven novels. The paper therefore separates close readings supported by usable primary texts from tentative comparisons that still need to be checked against reliable editions.

3.1 Corpus and Selection Rationale

The novels are selected because they draw on recognizable mythological traditions and offer different approaches to retelling, including antagonist-centred narration, female-centred narration, psychological characterization, rationalized mythic world-building, and thriller conventions. The corpus is purposive rather than statistically representative. It does not claim to cover all Indian-language traditions, all contemporary mythological fiction, or the full diversity of global retellings. The comparison is designed to identify interpretive patterns within the selected texts.

3.1.1 Evidence Tiers and Source Handling

To make this distinction clear, the analysis works with two levels of evidence. The first level covers novels for which usable primary texts are available; quotations and page references should be checked against the edition being cited. The second level covers novels represented only by summaries or quote collections, or for which no primary-text file was available. These materials can suggest themes worth investigating, but they cannot reliably support direct quotations, page-specific references, or detailed claims about narrative style. Publisher descriptions and scholarly studies can provide context, but they cannot replace the novels as primary evidence. The paper acknowledges this limitation openly.

3.2 Analytical Dimensions

The first dimension, degree of narrative transformation, examines how a novel retains, modifies, expands, or omits characters, episodes, plot structures, settings, and inherited moral judgments. The analysis distinguishes formal or generic change from ideological change: a novel may modernize the presentation of a myth without substantially revising its moral assumptions.

The second dimension, contemporary social relevance, examines how a novel engages with issues such as gender, caste, power, identity, violence, social hierarchy, cultural memory, or political authority. These issues are not assumed to be present in the same way in every text; each claim must be grounded in the novel's narrative and context.

The third dimension, narrative perspective, examines who narrates or focalizes the story, whose experiences are made visible, whose testimony is restricted, and how the redistribution of narrative authority affects the reader's interpretation of events. The terms narrator, focalization, and counter-narrative are related but not interchangeable and should be used precisely.

3.3 Procedure

1. For works available in a reliable, usable primary-text form, conduct close readings of relevant characters, episodes, narrative choices, and recurring themes. For works whose available files are summaries or quote compilations, use them only for preliminary orientation and do not treat them as primary-text evidence.
2. Identify and cite passages demonstrating retention, modification, or omission of inherited mythological material where the primary text and edition can be verified; otherwise mark the point as provisional and avoid direct quotation or page-specific claims.

3. Analyze the social or moral questions raised by those changes, distinguishing verified textual evidence from interpretation and from contextual information drawn from publisher descriptions or published scholarship.
4. Compare the novels using the same three analytical dimensions while accounting for differences in mythological tradition and genre.
5. Synthesize patterns and counterexamples, including cases where a retelling complicates rather than resolves questions of power or agency.

3.4 Scope and Limitations

The study analyzes literary representation and interpretive possibilities; it does not measure actual reader response or demonstrate that the novels cause changes in public attitudes. Such claims would require reception research, interviews, surveys, or other empirical evidence. In addition, the novels draw on traditions that have multiple textual, performative, and community-based versions. References to an “original myth” should therefore be avoided unless the specific source version is identified. Quotations and page references must be verified against the editions used by the researcher.

4. Textual Analysis and Discussion

The discussion below applies the same three analytical questions to all eleven novels, while recognizing that the available evidence is not equally strong for every work. Detailed interpretations should be supported by a checked copy of the novel. Where only a summary or quote collection is available, the discussion remains tentative. It avoids unverified quotations and page numbers and is offered as a point of comparison, not as a completed close reading.

4.1 Indian Mythological Fiction

4.1.1 Asura: Tale of the Vanquished

In *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, Anand Neelakantan shifts narrative attention toward Ravana and Bhadra, figures positioned outside the conventional centre of Rama’s heroic narrative. The principal transformation lies in perspective and characterization: the figure commonly associated with antagonism is given a narrative history, motives, and a social world. This strategy complicates a simple moral division between hero and villain by asking how moral judgments are shaped by the position from which a story is told.

The novel can be examined for its representation of social hierarchy and unequal access to authority. However, the argument should not assume that a marginal or oppositional narrator automatically represents all subaltern experience. The analysis should identify specific passages where class, caste, political power, or social exclusion shapes a character’s options, and should also consider where the narrative may reproduce the hierarchies it critiques.

4.1.2 Ajaya: Roll of the Dice

Ajaya: Roll of the Dice revisits the Mahabharata through perspectives associated with Duryodhana and characters aligned with the Kaurava side. Like *Asura*, it unsettles the familiarity of established moral alignments, but it does so within a different epic and political conflict. Its comparative value lies in showing how the reassessment of an antagonist can expose tensions between personal loyalty, social status, political legitimacy, and inherited ideas of dharma.

The analysis should distinguish between giving a character an intelligible motivation and endorsing that character’s actions. A counter-narrative may complicate judgment without requiring the reader to accept

the narrator's ethical position. A close reading of scenes in which authority, birth, loyalty, or justice is contested would strengthen this distinction.

4.1.3 The Immortals of Meluha

Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* reworks Shiva-related mythological material through a fictionalized world that uses rationalization, political organization, and contemporary narrative pacing. Rather than relying only on a shift to a marginalized narrator, the novel changes the terms through which the mythic figure and his world are presented. Shiva's characterization is developed through action, decision, and responsibility within the novel's constructed social order.

This example is useful for differentiating narrative modernization from counter-narrative. The novel's reinterpretation can be examined through its treatment of divinity, leadership, social regulation, and moral choice. The final analysis should specify which elements derive from the novel's own fictional system and should avoid treating its narrative details as a direct account of any single canonical Purana.

4.1.4 The Palace of Illusions

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni retells the Mahabharata through Draupadi's first-person perspective. This change gives the character interiority and makes her desires, judgments, and experiences central to the narrative. Events conventionally interpreted through the actions of male warriors and rulers are reconsidered through the consciousness of a woman whose life is shaped by marriage, kinship, court politics, and dynastic conflict.

The novel's feminist potential should be assessed with nuance. Narrative centrality gives Draupadi greater interpretive authority, but it does not mean that the character escapes the structures within which she acts. The analysis should consider the relation between agency and constraint, particularly where personal desire, public humiliation, caste, and dynastic obligations intersect.

4.1.5 The Krishna Key

Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* differs from the other Indian novels because it employs the conventions of the thriller. Mythological material is connected to investigation, clues, historical speculation, and contemporary questions of cultural identity. Its transformation therefore operates substantially through genre: myth becomes part of a mystery whose meanings are pursued through evidence and interpretation.

This novel should not be analyzed as if it used the same narrative strategy as a first-person feminist retelling. Its comparative significance lies in how a popular thriller reframes mythological material for contemporary narrative suspense. The analysis should distinguish the novel's fictional claims and devices from historical or archaeological facts and should avoid presenting plot elements as independently verified evidence about the past.

4.2 Global Mythological Fiction

4.2.1 The Penelopiad

Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* revisits the *Odyssey* through Penelope's account and gives the twelve maids a collective voice. The retelling shifts attention from the celebrated adventures of a male hero to the perspectives of figures whose experiences are subordinated or marginalized in the familiar narrative. The maids' presence also complicates the idea that one revised narrator can fully represent everyone excluded from the dominant story.

The novel's use of multiple modes of narration allows the analysis to consider both voice and the limits of voice. Penelope's account is not necessarily a neutral correction of the *Odyssey*; it is itself a situated

narrative. The maids' interventions further question who has the authority to explain violence and whose account is likely to be believed.

4.2.2 The Silence of the Girls

Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* foregrounds Briseis and other women affected by the Trojan War. By redirecting attention from heroic combat toward captivity, sexual violence, loss, and survival, the novel changes the ethical focus of the war narrative. Events that can be celebrated as military achievement in a warrior-centred account are reconsidered through the lives of those exposed to the consequences of conquest.

The novel's relevance to gender and war trauma should be grounded in close readings of narrative description, focalization, and the treatment of bodily vulnerability. The argument should avoid reducing the women to symbols of victimhood alone; it should examine how the text represents their survival, judgment, relationships, and constrained forms of agency.

4.2.3 The Song of Achilles

Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* retells material associated with the Trojan War through the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles. Its first-person narration by Patroclus alters the emotional centre of the heroic story, foregrounding intimacy, loyalty, vulnerability, and the personal costs of martial reputation. The transformation is therefore not simply a change in the moral status of a hero but a change in the values through which heroism is understood.

A comparative reading can examine how the novel places personal attachment alongside inherited ideals of honour, fame, and heroic destiny. Claims about gender or sexuality should be connected to specific narrative choices and should not be treated as a complete account of ancient Greek social practice; the novel is a contemporary literary reconstruction.

4.2.4 Circe

In *Circe*, Miller reimagines the mythological enchantress as the centre of a sustained narrative of development, conflict, and self-definition. The novel expands a figure often encountered through her relationship to male visitors and heroes into a character with a history, a voice, and changing forms of power. This shift invites attention to gender, autonomy, exile, and the relationship between knowledge and authority.

The analysis should explore the tension between empowerment and isolation: Circe's ability to act does not remove all forms of vulnerability or dependence. Comparing *Circe* with *The Song of Achilles* also allows the paper to examine how different first-person narrators produce distinct kinds of intimacy and moral emphasis.

4.2.5 The Gospel of Loki

Joanne Harris's *The Gospel of Loki* retells Norse mythological material through Loki's own voice. The narrator's position as a trickster and a figure associated with disruption makes reliability and self-justification important analytical questions. The novel invites readers to reconsider familiar moral categories, but Loki's account should not be equated with an objective or final explanation of the mythological world.

The most productive focus is the relationship between narrative control and moral ambiguity. A narrator can explain, rationalize, or contest the judgments made about him while still revealing the limits of his perspective. The paper should analyze how humour, tone, and retrospective narration shape the reader's response, using examples from the novel rather than relying only on the general claim that Loki is recast as a misunderstood antagonist.

4.2.6 Ariadne

Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne* revisits the Cretan myth through a woman-centred narrative, shifting attention toward Ariadne's choices and the consequences of her involvement in the stories of Theseus and other mythic figures. The retelling makes visible the gendered distribution of agency in narratives commonly organized around heroic quests. Its comparative value lies in how it repositions a woman who is essential to a familiar myth but is often remembered in relation to a male hero.

The analysis should examine whether Ariadne's narration and characterization establish independent motives and ethical judgments, and how the novel treats kinship, loyalty, abandonment, and the consequences of decisions made within unequal structures of power. It should also compare Ariadne's agency with Penelope's and Briseis's, without assuming that all three characters face identical constraints.

4.3 Comparative Synthesis

Across the eleven novels, narrative transformation takes several forms. Asura and Ajaya revise familiar moral alignments by foregrounding characters associated with the opposing side of epic conflict. The *Palace of Illusions*, *The Penelopiad*, *The Silence of the Girls*, *Circe*, and *Ariadne* redirect attention toward women whose perspectives alter the interpretation of established events. *The Song of Achilles* makes intimate attachment central to a heroic narrative, while *The Gospel of Loki* uses a trickster's voice to unsettle judgments about culpability. *The Immortals of Meluha* and *The Krishna Key* demonstrate different forms of modernization through fictionalized world-building and thriller conventions.

These strategies are comparable, but not identical. A narrator's change may transform the reader's access to a character without changing the major sequence of events. A genre shift may modernize the presentation of myth without necessarily challenging its gender or social assumptions. A woman-centred narrative may make agency more visible while still representing marriage, kinship, war, or dynastic duty as powerful constraints. A narrator positioned as an antagonist may expose the partiality of conventional moral judgments while also offering a self-serving account.

The second dimension, contemporary social relevance, likewise varies across the corpus. Gender and the unequal consequences of war are especially prominent in *The Palace of Illusions*, *The Penelopiad*, *The Silence of the Girls*, *Circe*, and *Ariadne*. Questions of hierarchy and moral authority can be explored in *Asura* and *Ajaya*, while *The Immortals of Meluha* and *The Krishna Key* invite attention to the modernization and popular circulation of myth. *The Song of Achilles* and *The Gospel of Loki* foreground the role of intimate or oppositional perspectives in rethinking heroism and blame. These themes should be presented as text-specific findings, not as a claim that every novel addresses every social issue equally.

The third dimension, narrative perspective, reveals that voice is not merely a formal device. It affects which experiences become narratable, which events receive emotional emphasis, and whose account is treated as credible. Yet the act of giving voice is not sufficient by itself to resolve questions of representation. Penelope's narration does not erase the maids' distinct position; a narrator such as Loki may challenge received judgments while remaining unreliable; and a protagonist's agency may remain limited by the social world the novel depicts. The strongest comparative conclusion is therefore not that retellings invariably liberate marginalized characters, but that they make the construction and limits of narrative authority more visible.

5. Research Contribution and Limitations

The paper's main contribution is a common framework for comparing eleven selected novels from Indian and global mythological fiction. It distinguishes character-centred revision, redistribution of narrative authority, genre-based modernization, and reinterpretation of moral judgment. Since access to the primary texts is uneven, the paper should be read as a comparative framework and preliminary synthesis rather than as eleven equally detailed close readings. Claims about the five works with insufficiently reliable primary-text access must remain provisional until checked against the editions used.

This study has several limitations: the novels were selected for a specific comparative purpose, the analysis depends on interpretation, and reliable primary texts were not available for every work. The uploaded files for Ajaya, Ariadne, The Gospel of Loki, and The Silence of the Girls include summary or quote-compilation material whose wording and pagination cannot safely be treated as the novels' own; a usable primary-text file for Circe was not available in the materials examined. Those five works remain in the selected corpus, but claims about them are deliberately cautious and require confirmation against reliable editions before being presented as close readings. The study also does not cover the full range of Indian-language retellings or the many oral, regional, religious, and performance traditions through which myths circulate. The study also does not examine how readers respond to these novels. Any claim that the books change public attitudes, moral beliefs, or ideology would need separate evidence about reception.

6. Conclusion

Contemporary mythological fiction does not simply reproduce inherited narratives, nor does it invariably replace them with a single new interpretation. The eleven novels examined here demonstrate a range of strategies through which mythological material is negotiated: some revise familiar moral alignments, some foreground women and other characters previously positioned at the margins, some recast heroic narratives through intimate or unreliable narrators, and others modernize myth through fictional world-building or thriller conventions.

The comparative framework highlights three interconnected aspects of this process. The degree of narrative transformation determines which characters, events, and moral assumptions are retained or revised. Contemporary social relevance emerges when these changes bring questions of gender, hierarchy, violence, identity, or authority into sharper focus. Narrative perspective shapes whose experiences are visible and how readers are invited to interpret them. None of these dimensions, however, guarantees a uniformly progressive outcome. A retelling may expose an inherited hierarchy while continuing to operate within its constraints, or challenge one moral binary while creating another. Mythological retellings are therefore best understood as negotiations between cultural memory and contemporary interpretation. Their significance lies in opening inherited stories to scrutiny, not in establishing a final or universally valid replacement narrative. By comparing Indian and global fiction, this study shows how literary revision can complicate established moral judgments and broaden the range of perspectives through which myth is understood, while leaving open the question of how readers and communities receive these narratives.

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