

**MYTHOLOGY AS HISTORY:
SACRED NATION, PATRIOTIC MASCULINITIES,
AND DEVOTED FEMININITIES IN
CONTEMPORARY POPULAR MYTHOHISTORICAL
FICTION**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI
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CONTEMPORARY POPULAR MYTHOHISTORICAL FICTION**

by

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Submitted

*in fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to the*



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March 2022

THESIS CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Mythology as History: Sacred Nation, Patriotic Masculinities, and Devoted Femininities in Contemporary Popular Mythohistorical Fiction**” being submitted by **Rituparna Sengupta** to Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a bona fide record of the research work done by her. She has worked under my guidance and supervision and has fulfilled the requirements, which to my knowledge, have reached the requisite standard for the submission of this thesis. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

This project studies a range of contemporary Indian mythology-based novels, graphic narratives, and films within the framework of a transmedia mode of popular textual production that I identify as the “mythohistorical”. I employ a combination of close textual analysis and an interdisciplinary theoretical approach to understand the contemporary popular and also locate it in a larger cultural trajectory of ideas, ideologies, and narrative practices from an earlier historical period. My central thesis is that the “mythohistorical” has emerged as a dominant mode of authoritative narration in our times that establishes a distinct discursive order cohering around cultural nationalism and religious devotion. To demonstrate this, I interpret hegemonic concepts of nationalism, masculinity, and femininity as interdependent, secular mythologies of the modern nation and show how they are constructed, conveyed, and constantly reinforced with the help of sacred discourses of mythology.

Essentially, the “mythohistorical” infuses an imaginary history with mythological symbolism to create a particular, recurrent narrative of the national past that it claims to be ‘authentic history’, in the process transforming the nature of mythology as well. This results in a mode of perception that imagines the nation in terms of a cyclical temporality that links the past and the present in seamless continuity, and an abstracted spiritual essence that (re)constitutes the national community as a religious community. Within this narrative universe, the soul of the nation is perpetually under siege and in need of protection from its citizen-devotees in specifically gendered capacities of “muscular patriotism” and “patriotic feminism”. The creation of such a moral order, in turn, elicits a mode of “patriotic consumption” that is instrumental in the construction of a new modern ‘self’ whose identity, ambitions, and relations with others are routed through the nation and are completely aligned with its perceived interests. Nevertheless, a smaller body of “contra-mythohistorical” texts disrupts the “mythohistorical” order of signification and challenges the latter’s fundamental assumptions and assertions. Overall, I examine popular culture as a field of fierce contestations between the “mythohistorical” and the “contra-mythohistorical” over crucial questions of identity, belonging, citizenship, and patriotism.

Keywords: mythohistorical, authentic history, patriotic consumption, nationalism, muscular patriotism, patriotic feminism

सार

यह शोध समकालीन भारतीय उपन्यासों, ग्राफ़िक उपन्यासों, और फिल्मों का अध्ययन करती है जो पौराणिक मिथकों पर आधारित हैं। मैं इन कथाओं का अन्वेषण लोकप्रिय पाठ्य उत्पादन के एक ट्रांसमीडिया ढांचे के ज़रिये करती हूँ जिसे मैं “मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” बतलाती हूँ। सूक्ष्म पाठ विश्लेषण और अंतःविषय सैद्धांतिक पद्धति के प्रयोग से मैं इस समकालीन लोकप्रियता को समझने की कोशिश करती हूँ तथा इसे ऐतिहासिक विचारों, विचारधाराओं और कथा प्रथाओं के सांस्कृतिक प्रक्षेपपथ में भी स्थित करती हूँ। मेरा केंद्रीय तर्क यह है कि हमारे समय में “मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” एक ऐसी आख्यान की प्रणाली है जो आधिकारिक रूप में उभर के आया है और जिसने सांस्कृतिक राष्ट्रवाद और धार्मिक भक्ति के इर्द-गिर्द एक अलग तार्किक व्यवस्था स्थापित किया है। इसे सिद्ध करने के लिए, मैं राष्ट्रवाद, पुरुषत्व और स्त्रीत्व के प्रमुख परिकल्पनाओं को आधुनिक राष्ट्र के अन्योन्याश्रित, असांप्रदायिक मिथक (मॉयथोलोजिज़) समझती हूँ जो अपना निर्माण, संप्रेषण, और सुदृढ़ीकरण पौराणिक मिथकों के माध्यम से कर रहे हैं।

वास्तव में “मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” मिथक प्रतीकों के द्वारा एक विशेष पुनरावर्ती आख्यान रचता है जो एक काल्पनिक इतिहास को राष्ट्र के ‘वास्तविक इतिहास’ होने का दावा करता है। इस प्रक्रिया में पौराणिक कथाओं की प्रकृति भी बदलती रहती हैं। इसका परिणाम प्रत्यक्षण की एक ऐसी प्रणाली है जो काल व्यवस्था की कल्पना चक्रीय युगों के बल पर करती है जिसमें राष्ट्र के अतीत और वर्तमान एक निर्बाध निरंतरता में जुड़े हुए प्रतीत होते हैं। साथ ही, राष्ट्र का एक अमूर्त आध्यात्मिक सार निर्दिष्ट किया जाता है जो राष्ट्रीय समुदाय का गठन एक धार्मिक समुदाय के रूप में करता है। इस कथनात्मक सृष्टि में राष्ट्र की आत्मा निरंतर खतरे में होती है और “बलवान देशभक्ति” एवं “देशभक्तिपूर्ण नारीवाद” के विशेष लैंगिक क्षमताओं में अपने नागरिक-भक्तों से सुरक्षा की अपेक्षा रखती है। इस नैतिक व्यवस्था की रचना से “देशभक्तिपूर्ण उपभोग” की एक ऐसी प्रणाली उत्पन्न होती है जिसके सहारे एक नए आधुनिक ‘स्व’ का भी निर्माण होता है जिसकी पहचान, महत्वाकांक्षाएं और परस्पर संबंध केवल राष्ट्र के ही माध्यम से होते हैं और राष्ट्र के ही तथा-कथित हित से पूरी तरह से निर्धारित होते हैं। वही दूसरी ओर कुछ “कॉण्ट्रा मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” (मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल का विलोम) कहानियाँ भी हैं जो “मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” संकेतन की मौलिक धारणाओं और दावों को चुनौती देती हैं। कुल मिलाकर, मैं समकालीन लोकप्रिय संस्कृति को “मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” और “कॉण्ट्रा मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल” के बीच पहचान, नागरिकता, और देशभक्ति के महत्वपूर्ण सवालों से होते हुए संघर्ष के नज़रिये से समझने का प्रयास करती हूँ।

मूल शब्द: मॉयथोहिस्टॉरिकल, वास्तविक इतिहास, देशभक्तिपूर्ण उपभोग, राष्ट्रवाद, बलवान देशभक्ति, देशभक्तिपूर्ण नारीवाद

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis Certificate	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract (English)	iv
Abstract (Hindi)	v
Chapter 1: Introduction: Mythology and Popular Culture	1
Mythology and the Epics	4
Popular Mythology and National Culture	11
A. Chromolithography	12
B. Popular Hindi Film	17
C. <i>Amar Chitra Katha</i> comics	21
D. Dharmic serials	24
My Thesis: The Mythohistorical	29
A. Primary Texts	31
B. Chapter Outlines	34
Culture Studies—A Method	40
Chapter 2: The Emergence of the Mythohistorical Novel in English	46
English, Indianness, and Authenticity	47
Chetan Bhagat and the Rise of the Authorpreneur	55
The Emergence of the Mythohistorical in Indian Writing in English	64
Chapter 3: The Sacred Nation in the Mythohistorical	73
Introduction: Nationalism as Religion	73
Nation as Sacred Motherland in the Mythohistorical Film	81
Nation as Neoliberal Utopia in Amish's <i>Shiva</i> Trilogy	93
Nation as Dystopia: The Contra-Mythohistorical	104
Conclusion: Nation as Utopia, Dystopia, Heterotopia	112

Chapter 4: Patriotic Masculinities in the Mythohistorical	117
Introduction: Masculinity and Patriotism	117
Masculinising the Nation-State: Amish’s <i>Ram Chandra</i> Series	127
Embodiment of Muscular Patriotism in the Mahaveer: <i>Baahubali</i>	134
Muslim Masculinity and Hindu Emasculation— <i>Padmaavat</i>	144
“Shanta” and “Ugra”: The Many Hanumans in Popular Visual Culture	153
Conclusion: Masculinising Nation/Nationalising Masculinity	161
Chapter 5: Devoted Femininities in the Mythohistorical	166
Introduction: Woman and Nation	166
A. Arya Woman	167
B. New Hindu Womanhood	172
Sita: Female Agency and Subjecthood	178
A. <i>Sita: Daughter of the Earth</i> —Pativratism as Agency	179
B. <i>Padmaavat</i> : Feminist Patriotism	183
C. <i>The Missing Queen</i> —Rejecting Rescue	187
Manikarnika as Virangana-Sati	190
<i>Sita’s Ramayana</i> —Female Fortitude and Ecofeminism	200
Conclusion: Twenty-first-Century Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question	210
Chapter 6: The Mythohistorical as the New Popular	214
The Mythohistorical as a Hybrid Novel-Epic	215
New Readership/Authorship Practices: “Amish & the Immortals”	221
Popular English Novel and Popular Hindi Film: Transmedia Mythohistorical.....	230
Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Mythohistorical Novel	235
Chapter 7: Conclusion: Patriotic Consumption and Mythohistorical Realism	242
Nation, Gender, and Patriotic History	242
Globalisation, Middle-classness, and Patriotic Consumption	248
Imagining the Nation through Mythohistorical Realism	259
Works Cited	269
Bio-data	312