

**RE-VISITING, RESURRECTING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE MYTHOLOGY:
THREE DIMENSIONS OF RESURGING YOUNG ADULT NOVELS**

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Abstract

Writing fantasy novels, especially for Young Adult readers has been the rage for a while now. Especially themes that are centered on religious myths are highly sought out these days. In a frenzy to attract audiences and to increase book sales authors are amount to write blasphemous contents and head over heels to create new controversies. The ‘Lakshman rekha’(moral boundary) of what can be criticized and what not to be criticized is debated every day. Religious beliefs are constantly questioned and altered as religion itself is nothing but an attempt to understand God and divinity. But all beliefs can’t simply be dismissed as superstitions as some beliefs are the very foundations of the said religions. Thus, rewriting mythologies has to be defined, be classified and be safeguarded. This article is an attempt to define and classify the various forms of rewriting works that are based on ancient and old mythologies. This article hypothesizes that firstly, ‘revisiting mythology’ means writing novels on established myths such werewolves, vampires and so on, secondly rewriting novels on myths of dead religions or unknown religious practices should be defined as ‘resurrecting mythology’ and finally, questioning, juxtaposing, redefining, editing and recalibrating the religious myths and in extreme cases, completely rewriting an established myth for establishing equality, democratic practices and other noble notions should be called ‘reconstructing mythology’.

Keywords: Mythology, Reconstruction, Young Adult novels

In the “General Introduction” to his *Comparative Literature: Matter and Method*, A. Owen Aldridge begins his second paragraph: “*It is now generally agreed that comparative literature does not compare national literatures in the sense of setting one against another. Instead it provides a method of broadening one’s perspective in the approach to single works of literature – a way of looking beyond the narrow boundaries of national frontiers in order to discern trends and movements in various national cultures and to see the relation between literature and other spheres of human activity.*” Hence, this paper attempts comparing various

young adult novel series, on the basis of viewing mythology and its sentimental values will rightly fall into the sphere of the comparative literature.

Writing novels for young adults by itself is a challenging task if not a daunting one; and writing a novel resurrecting the characters, events and beliefs that belong to one particular religion and mythology is like a *fire-walking* test. The writer is expected to respect the sentiments of the referred religion; it does not matter if it is a religion in practice or not. One should not be naïve enough to incite the fundamental, feral and furious response from pious community while he is exercising his artistic license to critique the elements of mythology. A Danish magazine's simple cartoon portraying Prophet Mohammed's picture incites violence and bloodshed all over the world could probably be cited as an apt instance. While the West sees the matter in view of Freedom of the Speech and Expression, and Freedom of the Press, the conservative Orient sees it as a sacrilege and defamation. In the movie *Lara Croft: The Tomb Raider* there is a scene where statues of monkey soldiers (Hanuman) at a temple of the famed Angkor Wat complex in Cambodia sprang to life and attack the movie's heroine, Lara Croft, played by Oscar-winning actress Angelina Jolie, for disrupting the atmosphere of the temple. Hindus in Indian Subcontinent and worldwide, particularly objected one scene in which the Hanuman army was portrayed as monsters and was blasted into pieces by guns. The offended community even went to Federal Court to axe the concerned scenes. The mammoth victory of the Harry Potter Series both in print and movie versions triggers the commercial thrusting in to the world of Western Mythology. Popular European beliefs such as vampires, werewolves, demons, and angels are finally given the importance they so richly deserved. Like a desert absorbing rare raindrops, the readers and viewers absorbed the juicy details of the modern mythology which prompted a lukewarm response from various publications to publish fantasy novels.

Amidst the tirade of such young adult fantasy novels, fewer novels kindle the fascination of the adolescent readers. Such is the work, Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy which starts with *Northern Lights* (1995) revisits the mythology of the Christianity and John Milton's "*Paradise Lost*". The series was criticized for the negative portrayal of the Church and the religion in general. In 2008, American Library Association declared that Pullman's fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, was the second most demanded series to be banned across the USA. In the series, the last book *The Amber Spyglass* describes the rival portrayal of Adam-Eve-Satan's dialogue. In opposition to the Christian myth that the Satan in snake form lured the Eve to eat the apple and finding the carnal feelings and shame, Phillip Pullman resurrects the story that knowing to love is divine; not original sin which brings the fall of man. Along with the Original Sin, several Christian myths are questioned or retold and by thus created a volcano of opposition.

In Amish Tripathi's *The Shiva Trilogy*, the story revisits several Hindu mythologies. In his first novel of the trilogy *The Immortals of Meluha* itself, Amish Tripathi declared that all Gods were once human beings; it was their deeds in the human life that made them famous as Gods. Amish resurrect the Hindu mythological substance Amrita, the elixir of the life of the Hindu Gods, as a medicine. The Meluha society is immortal and devoid of all diseases because of consuming Amrita. When the chief of Guna Tribe, Shiva drinks the elixir his throat turns into blue and hence believed as Neelkanth by Meluga tribes. Hindu mythology explains that Lord Shiva drank Universe's severest poison sprouted by the holy snake Vasuki to save the Creation.

However he was saved by his goddess wife Parvati by grasping his neck and making the poison stay in his throat and thus his throat turned blue and he was called ‘Neelkanth’ (Neel=Blue; Kanth=Throat). Throughout the series several Hindu mythologies are revisited and are given new light into them.

In Rick Riordan’s popular *Percy Jackson series*, Percy is described as a demigod, who is an off-spring of a Greek God and a human being. He is the son of Poseidon, the god of all Seas and thus the one of the powerful Three Greek Gods. Percy is considered as a prime suspect of the theft of the lightning bolt of the Zeus, the King of all gods. This is due to the break of the great oath that Greek Trinity Gods shouldn’t create demigod children anymore as they tend to create havoc in the world by indulging in wars such as World War I and World War II. Zeus suspects Poseidon meddled with the lightning bolt by using Percy as he couldn’t do it himself and threatened to destroy the world if the bolt wasn’t returned before the Summer Solstice. Hence, Percy along with his then girlfriend Annabeth and his best friend Grover begin a quest and even visit the Underworld and confront the unexpected *frenemy*, Luke and recapture the bolt and returned it in the end of the novel. The very thought that Greek Gods are alive and Greek Gods as characters in the novel series makes the critics raise their brows. The vivid and accurate portrayal of the Gods is much to be appreciated. Though Greek Religion has no followers at the present time, Rick Riordan’s respect for the religion is commendable. There is no doubt though the series are viewed as Young Adult novel series now they will stay against the waves of time and will leave its marks in history and will be a modern “Mahabharatha” or “Paradise Lost”.

Karen Essex, a famous historical novelist and screenwriter in her ‘Dracula in Love’ profoundly professed that “I’m afraid that the gift of visiting the past is all that we have. We can revisit it, but only as it happened.” Though I may be quoting Karen Essex out of context, it indeed is true that we should revisit the mythology as it is envisioned and described in the original text. While a literary work has all the rights to question a religion and laughing at the superstitious nature of myths and hurting the sentimental value of the society for the benefit of the society and literature, Literature is not all about attacking religion or inadvertently mocking the sentiments of a religion. Recently while I was reading I am Number Four series by Pittacus Lore, the pseudonym of James Frey and Jobie Hughes, I was shocked to see Number Eight, one of the heroes of the novel series, been shape shifting into Lord Narashimha during fight sequences and got beaten and in some areas he is failed in his missions as well.(This incident comes in the fourth and Fifth books of the Series). Most of the Hindus would find it sacrilege that an avatar of Hindu God can be beaten and kicked even for a fight sequence and the person who shape shifted in to the god’s form ‘narashimha’ is neither a believer nor a Avatar. Hence, I decided to write an article framing borders for recreation of mythology in modern novels and by doing that emphasizing the importance that such novels are not just written for the recreation of others at the expense of the particular religious people.

Re-visiting mythology, Resurrecting mythology and Reconstructing mythology are so mixed up in these works that their difference is getting murkier and murkier. Hence I would like to hypothesize that they should be differentiated and compartmentalized for once and all. When a part of a mythology or one aspect of a mythology is fancied by an author and is used in the literary work as a base, we could determine the usage as revisiting the mythology. Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series are revisiting the immortality of the Vampires and Werewolves could be cited as an instance for revisiting the mythology. Resurrecting mythology is more than just

revisiting or reusing the one aspect of the mythology. If an author using the mythological aspects, elements or even the same characters, plot or references of a particular mythology, when that mythology is partially or entirely abandoned due to discontinuation of the religion, culture or beliefs, could easily be defined as resurrecting mythology. Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series which has pivoted around Greek Gods and their eccentric behavior and fate of the humanity and his other series "The Kane Chronicles" deals with the Egyptian Gods and Egyptian mythology can be quoted as examples for Resurrecting Mythology for modern readers who may not know these myths. Reconstructing Mythology is a controversial one as it tries to clean the clumsiness in the mythologies. Phillip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' is confronting the Biblical version of the Fall of the Man or Original sin and reconstructing it by retelling it that falling in love is no sin and it has to happen and it is the best thing ever happened to humanity against the advocacy of the Church and Amish Tripathi's 'The Shiva Trilogy' which reconstructs the Hindu mythology by stating Gods are only human and for their greater deeds only they are worshipped.

While revisiting and resurrecting the mythologies, the author should not attempt to deface the original nature or the very characteristics of a character. Doing such would be sacrilege and will lead to misinformation to the readers of another culture. For instance, a Nordic God Loki (Lopt, or Hveðrungr), is deemed as a god of mischievousness in Norse mythology. Describing him as a benevolent one will be ludicrous. Hence, it would be better that the good and bad characters of mythology can better be left as they once were. It is better that the mythological concept of 'Avatar' should be dealt with more care. Avatar is a reincarnation of a God and hence the Avatar is able to do great deeds in the Hindu epics. Depicting a hero as an avatar who belongs to altogether another religion is sacrilegious and so is a human shape-shifting into a God's form.

In the realm of reconstructing a mythology, a mythology is questioned and is criticized and is attempted to reconstruct its objectionable part or to denounce it altogether. In Tamil Literature, Puthumai Pitthan's "Akalya" is a great example in this regard. Akalya is outraged when she comes to know that she is punished that she should be turned into a stone till her atonement is done since she couldn't identify Lord Indira, who was in disguise of his husband when he approached her and slept with her. As Akalya couldn't digest the injustice done to Sita, (Lord Ram's wife,) she preferred to remain stone for the rest of her life. In Phillip Pullman's His Dark Materials Pullman questions the religious belief that Man's Original Sin is that Adam was tempted by Eve (who was tempted by Satan himself) to eat an apple and thus they came to know their sexuality and sex itself. Pullman argues that so-called original sin is anything but. It's the thing that makes us fully human. In The Golden Compass adds a twist to the story of Adam and Eve. It says that when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, their demons stopped shape-shifting and settled into one form. This connects the Bible story to Pullman's world, hinting that there's a link between sinning and the time when children go through puberty and their demons settle. Asriel tells Lyra that though no one actually knows what Dust is, the Magisterium concluded that "Dust was the physical evidence for original sin" (21.98). Dust, then, is proof of humankind's inherent sinfulness. Lord Asriel wants to destroy Dust because he claims "sin and shame and death. It came the moment [Adam and Eve's] demons became fixed" In the Paradise Lost, Satan plays the role of Tempter and in The Amber Spyglass Dr. Mary Malone plays the role of the Tempter. However, gaining knowledge and growing out of innocence is not bad thing after all. "The famous story of . . . temptation in the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man . . . [has] been presented as being a very bad thing . . . Eve was very wicked and we all got covered in

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sorrow and sin and misery from then on as a result of this . . . Well, I just reversed that. I thought, wasn't it a good thing that Eve did, isn't curiosity a valuable quality? . . . It wasn't, after all, that she was after money or gold or anything, she was after knowledge. What could possibly be wrong with that?"

Thus, this paper attempts to hypothesize that how an author can revisit, resurrect and reconstruct the mythology and how to bring necessary additions to the ancient story and continue it or create altogether a new story.

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