

ISSN: 0976-8165

Vol.8, Issue-V (October 2017)

THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

8th Year of Open Access

The Criterion 

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Europa and Mahabharata: Mythscapes that Build and Un-Build Nations

Dr. Sreepriya Balakrishnan

Assistant Professor
Dept of English
Government Victoria
Palakkad, Kerala.

Article History: Submitted-17/08/2017, Revised-08/11/2017, Accepted-09/11/2017, Published-20/11/2017.

Abstract:

The Cultural imperialism of dominant narratives were always part of nation-building processes. Since it was difficult to define people of multiple cultures and races within a singularity, a common tradition of philosophy, thought, art and writing was often evoked in cultural contexts. Multicultural geographies like Europe and India were conceived to manifest evidently in their philosophical and literary tradition, some 'original' mythical roots. However the fact remains that there has always been ethnical, regional and folk elements outside mainstream tradition that were subdued in the nation-building process. This paper considers two mythical symbols of union that were part of the narratives of enforced unification of European Union and India. In the case of Europe, the myth of Europa, which gave the continent a name and an idea to unite upon: in the case of India the mythical narrative of Mahabharata which also incidentally was instrumental in the forming of the nation's alternate Sanskritized name, Bharata. In the case of Europe, my thrust is on the narrative of Europa itself, on the line of transformation that its signification took from its earliest uses to some most recent ones, how one myth was interpreted and used differently across the fleeting temporalities in the continent's history. In the case of Mahabharata, my concern would be to see how the intricate fabric of pluralities of the myth came to be repressed in favor of some monolithic whole. In both cases, the political project of a union was manufactured through the myths. This exercise sometimes involved hermeneutic descends into the mythical well from time to time, or literary capitalization of one or other narrative, textualisation of oral and folk traditions so on and so forth. But if a reprisal of the myths rejuvenated with local colors could sometimes strengthen the false idea of any nation, it can also certainly challenge the clauses of the same nations that were imagined with their help. In an age when metanarratives of unification are imposed to instill patriotism, when myths are conflated with history as well as science and are used to revoke imagined glories of past, it is important to focus on the pluralities of every myth. This paper turns to glance through the political use of two mythical metanarratives – that of Europa and Mahabharata to reclaim them as ambivalent 'mythscapes' that effects spaces of exclusion and inclusion.

Keywords: Myth, Nationalism, European Union, India, Mahabharata, Europa

Every nation is a story in making, and every story is undecided. A story remains a story only as much as it is in that aporia, refusing the finality that facts claim. A story exists only in its telling and every telling un-builds another. Like stories, nations also are cultural artifacts, figurative plots that attempt to hold people together. In the words of Homi K Bhabha, 'a nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor' (Bhabha140). Nation as a narrative strategy has to remain very ambivalent. The language of nation always comes laden with the prologues of the past, the most remote rather than the immediate and the present, a fact which led Anderson to look at nations as imagined communities that celebrate their hoary pasts rather than their promising youths. The present becoming or the modernity of nations and their rhetorical past cumulatively create the ambivalence needed for a nation-space.

The Cultural imperialism of dominant narratives were always part of nation-building processes. Since it was difficult to define people of multiple cultures and races within a singularity, a common tradition of philosophy, thought, art and writing was often evoked in cultural contexts. Multiultural geographies like Europe and India were conceived to manifest evidently in their philosophical and literary tradition, some 'original' mythical roots. However the fact remains that there has always been ethnical, regional and folk elements outside mainstream tradition that were subdued in the nation-building processes. This paper reflects on two mythical narratives of Europe and India that reveals 'nation as a temporal process' (Bhabha) that is neither transfixed on the discourses about its origin, nor possessed by notions of homogeneity of any narrative about it. Homi.K Bhabha explores how a nation's story is that of a politics without duration in which the same metaphors of social cohesion are shared by the theories of holism of culture and the theories that are expressive of unitary collective experiences, like that of gender, class or race. He observes that in a nationspace, the concept of people emerges within a 'double narrative'. The double narrative implies that the people are both part of the nationalist narrative, objects of its discourse and are themselves a complex rhetorical strategy and so the subjects of a process of signification.

The concepts of a unified nation always came up in history after any disastrous war or conflict fought for consolidation or expansion of territorial power, in the name of religious supremacy or cultural hegemony. It happened in the Europe in the 1555, after the hundred years war and again after the second world war. It happened in India or the Indian subcontinent after the rise of every dynasty from the Vedic periods, through the Gupthas and Mauryas, the Mugals and the Nationalist Movement. (Though there is considerable theoretical difference between the post-imperial European notion called Nation and the unifying cultural idea called 'desha' in the Indian context, 'deshas' have

also stood together as communities by using the fabric of myths) The rhetoric of unification always follows an opportune moment for myth construction. This does not mean that myths are made for the purpose. The process is subtler than the conspicuous acculturation and destruction of cultures found elsewhere in historical narratives, cultures that were completely wiped off and tolerated only in museums and heroic re-representations like Palerm in the Amerindian context.

‘Mythscape’ is a temporally and spatially extended discursive realm in which myths of nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated and reconstructed constantly (Bell). The spaces of mythical discourses had been very seminal in the knowledge building process of all nations and cultures. Mythscapes remain in the cultural psyche of communities through commentaries, interpretations, literary discourses, media, art and ritual. While the classical myths of ancient Rome and Greece has been the mythscape for Europe, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata has remained, in their mutating forms integral as a mythscape for the Indian subcontinent. I consider two mythical symbols of union that were part of the narratives of enforced unification of Europe and India. In the case of Europe, the myth of Europa, which gave the continent a name and an idea to unite upon ; in the case of India the mythical narrative of Mahabharata which also incidentally was instrumental in the forming of the nation’s alternate Sanskritized name, Bharata. In the case of Europe, my thrust is on the narrative of Europa itself, on the line of transformation that its signification took from its earliest uses to some most recent ones, how one myth was interpreted and used differently across the fleeting temporalities in the continent’s history. In the case of Mahabharata, my concern would be to see how the intricate fabric of pluralities of the myth came to be repressed in favor of some monolithic whole. In both cases, the political project of a union was manufactured through the myths. This exercise sometimes involved hermeneutic descends into the mythical well from time to time, or literary capitalization of one or other narrative, textualisation of oral and folk traditions so on and so forth. As two streams of knowledge equipped to represent the aspirations, the fears, the triumphs and traumas of cultures that create heterogeneous realities within superficial unity, as two oldest zones of cultural and literary production, the European and Indian contexts reflects how a cultural unity is supposed, achieved and disputed in narrative spaces.

Europa and Europe

In the early formative periods of the concept of a political Union in modern Europe, the hegemony of major players namely Germany, France and Britain, established the superiority of the literary masterpieces and myths of these nations. The unity of European cultures as illustrated by arts and ideas was a necessary pre-occupation for the intellectuals and councils of high culture of the time. Due to a felt need for common cultural past many classical myths were employed to define a very fluid concept of a

state. It was insisted time and again that a collective 'European' culture was the strongest link to unite the geographical area. It is also not incidental that literature and art has conspired with the dominant political forces of the time to sustain this paradigm of constructed elite Europeanness. Voltaire's vision about a European 'res publica literaria' in which all European intellectuals would gather together and converse in French on the shared beliefs and values of Enlightenment, for instance, was in vogue during the Napoleonic hegemony of the region. From Novalis's *Essays on Europe*, William Penn's *Essays on the peace in Europe*, till Kant's 'Perpetual peace: A Philosophical Sketch', the idea of a united Christendom and foundation stone of Europe got slowly diluted into a form of Enlightenment secularism that carried its high priesthood in blood and veins. When most stories about Europe earlier began with Charlemagne, who was christened in Rome in 800 AD, with Enlightenment and classical revival, the onus of cultural unification fell to the antiquity, the Greco-Roman cultures.

Edward Said in psychoanalyzing Freud, observes how the stories of Ancient Greece, Rome and Israel were the predecessors for Freud's images and concepts. "Wherever the names Caesar, Gaius, Trajan and Virgil, wherever the names Moses and St. Paul, wherever the names Aristotle, Plato and Euclid have a significance and carry weight, that is where Europe is" wrote, Paul Valéry (322). Echoing him, T.S Eliot had written in his essay, *Unity of European Culture*, "Whenever a Virgil, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Goethe is born, the whole future of European poetry is altered" (192). He also laments in the same article that less and less people from Europe speak about Europe and speak more about their own regional specifications. One could see that the feeling of abandoned 'Europeanness', of the lost European was more in those periods of political unification because there was hardly any Europeanness of that kind available in the cultural sphere. This Europeanness, as postcolonial theories further prove was a mythical imaginary often considered as a template of modernity for the rest of the colonial world to emulate and build up. It was thus necessary for the emerging scholarship from the postcolonial milieu to critique the intellectual and historical traditions of Europe, to 'provincialize' every particular legacy of colonialism and understand that there was nothing 'universal' about them (Chakrabarty). It is also the same Europeanness or the need for the same that from time to time infests European theorist with an urge to locate a crisis in European subjectivity and formulate a discourse comprehensive and particular enough to give meaning to its diversities. (Kristeva). But as Martin Bernal showed in *Black Athena*, the Afroasiatic roots of classical civilizations reveals that Greece, which is considered to be the cradle of Europe, in fact received its higher cultures from Africa and Egypt. Not only that, Bernal also proves that it is the ideological forces of racism that made it intolerable for European modernity to accept its Afroasiatic roots. Equally overlooked are the influences of Islam in medieval Europe in fields as varied as commerce, philosophy, law and technology (Watt). The early legacies of Greece and Rome and the legacy of Christian heritage that signified a Europe were what the builders

of the idea of Europe turned to for every unifying project. The myth of Europa is one such legacy. The nationalistic use of the myth of Europa evidently excluded the historical experiences of most new members of European Union, a political patchwork product. The cultural and social experiences of the so-called 'communist bloc', the new nations in the Union, are largely and sometimes entirely different from that of the West, not to speak of the non-Christian, post-colonial and regional others within. How was the myth of the Europa interpreted differently to relate to the cultural realities of the present in the continuity of an imagined unity?

Like many proto-national figures, the name Europe also comes from a mythical woman. Europa is a Phoenician princess, thought to be the sister of Asia and Lybia (the other two continents) and depicted by Homer as the daughter of Phoenix, who abandoned her homeland for the western island of Crete, after being seduced by Zeus in the form of a white bull. The first extensive use of the myth in the context of unification was the ecclesiastical use of Europa during the Christian unifications of European mainland under Charlemagne in the 8th century. Though historians of the Enlightenment tradition looked at myths as dangerous distortion of truths, (S Berger), there has been countless literary variations of the myth of Europa during different literary periods in European cultural past, especially in poetry during romanticism and historical fiction in realist traditions, Arthur Rimbaud's *Soleil et chair*, Tennyson's *Palace of Arts*, Yeats' *Crazy Jane* to name just three. In the various literary interpretations of the myth of Europa, generally the displacement of Europa is viewed in two contrasting ways—as abduction or elopement. Whether as abduction or as elopement, Europa and the bull became a symbol of national personification.

In 20th century post-war Europe the narrative of Europa met with a political interest when there was a strong need to define Europe as a cultural entity, different from the economic and military alliances of the past. In a period when the decolonization process was being concluded, there was a need to define a new project of return, which the myths related to Europa established in a way. In the post-war Europe the sequels to the myth of abduction came up in prominence due to the specific cultural need of the time. The myth was required to be the symbolic idea of a Europe 'to be found'. The myth had to leave behind the dark memories of an immediate colonial past. Three interpretations of the myth are identified (Manners), when the story of Europa became seminal to the self constitution of an alliance between the European countries and its relations to the rest of the world. While "Abduction of Europa" was the mythical stereotype related to the Nazi crisis, where Zeus/bull was the symbol of extreme forces of nationalism, violence and oppression of the Nazi regime to which Europe was subjected to, in 'Seduction of Europa', Zeus/bull was the liberating American capitalism that took Europe away from its futile past to much wilder promises. A third understanding was that of the 'Transition of Europa' where the bull was neither oppressing nor seducing, but

metaphor for the transition into the post-nation Europe. Alternatively, in some interpretations the bull became the seduced animal, and Europa, the powerful female figure riding it, as depicted in the famous sculptor near European parliament headquarters in Brussels. In all these interpretative understandings, political discourses used particular legends from Europa's story to their advantage. There was the legend of the five sons of Europa's father King Agenor who went in search of Europa. They were said to have founded cities and places like Carthage and Spain. In fact one of them called Cadmus was asked by the Delphic Oracle to follow a cow and build a city where it falls dead, which emphasized the founding process of the geographical locale as incessant (Reikmann). As Dennis de Rougemont interpreted it in 'The meaning of Europe', Europe could only be found in its making, as the myth of Cadmus tells us. This was written during a period when the Europe, after returning back from the colonial plunders had to look into itself. Homer's description of Zeus as Eupepos, meaning one who sees very far also came up to aid this interpretation. What one has to remind oneself is the fact that for the Greeks, Europe was a geographical notion of an unknown territory in the north where Barbarians lived! In the 1950s, when there were many programmatic attempts to rewrite Europe's history in order to deliver the mythical foundations for the project of political unity, a myth about abduction and uprooting was used to invent a certain rootedness. Even at the outset of the project, doubtful voices pointed to the fact that there are huge generalizations to make the idea of Europe, for the Greeks and Romans certainly did not have an idea of Europe in the modern sense. (Hay) After all, for the Greeks, Europa was the more distant and unknown territory beyond Crete and distinct from the other land masses they knew, Libya and Asia.

The programmatic attempts to rewrite Europe's history in order to deliver the mythical foundations for the project of political unity, the mythical magic formula, largely concealed the fact that Europe was an economical and political notion constructed in the shadow of the Cold War. This stylized mythical context ironically rejected even genuine European inventions like communism and Marxism. The myth of Europe that depended largely on the values of freedom, welfare, technology etc, had to draw upon a much more remote history and myth of a golden past. The myth of a 'Golden Age' is part of all national revivals. And any myth about a golden age only carries half of the narrative with it, the rest is strategically repressed.

In 20th century we find a complete reversal of roles with Europa seducing Zeus who is in the form of a bull. Though the changes are evidently caught in visual arts, literature also reverberates with the conceptual changes within the communities that interpreted the myth. The countless interpretations of the myth as a saga of love and the burdens of love, during the early formative periods of the idea of Europe served as a defining force in building a notion about Europe and Europeanness. It is this idea that was largely perennial to the discourses of unification. Incidentally Europa has also been

referred to in the contexts of plundering and totalitarian squander, from the beginning of Christian era by Roman authors to the post war *Rape of Europa*, the book by Lynn H Nikolas about the Nazi plunder of art from occupied countries. The interpretations of the myth initialize the conflict within the mythical structure, reading it as a tale of love that was sensationalized as rape, or a tale of foundations against tales of migrations. What we could decipher from here is that the role of the seducer and seduced capsizes—the tale of seduction becomes a tale of abduction ; and in criticizing Nazi plunder with the image of a rape of Europa, the narrative could be conceived to become self-critical through its own interpretation of another European legacy, namely Fascism.

Another idea of Europe, which prevailed from the Middle Ages and that sprang up unreservedly after 1945 was the idea of Europe based on Christian values. This idea could be seen to emerge along with the clash of Christianity and Islam in the sixth and seventh centuries CE, when Islam emerged as an adversarial identity in the West. Important writers and literary figures of the inter and post war period, including T S Eliot, Edmund Husserl and Paul Valéry believed in the unity of a European tradition that can grow on the old roots, the Christian faith and Classical literary traditions that are said to be inherited by Europeans in common. It is not untrue to say that this sense of Europe can be traced back to the Middle ages, to the English and French Literature of the 14 th century, to Joan of Arc, to the common historical heritage of Renaissance and Enlightenment, to the Elizabethans and to Shakespeare. But in the wake of post-colonial identity issues, advanced capitalism, globalization and transnationalisation, let alone the crucial questions of building nations out of economic co-operative systems, to speak of democracy within nations, we need the broader discursive space where ideas conflict and realities get constituted through the conflicts. The idea of a democratic nation is apparently successful when it fails to become cohesive. Any discourse of Europe thus has to hold both the myths of expansions in the western frontiers and the violent narratives of homogenization in the eastern frontier. When T S Eliot made the famous statement that it is impossible to understand one European literature without knowing a good deal about others, he had the literatures of England, Germany and France in mind. One cannot expect him to have included much of Eastern Europe's literatures, the Slavic, Czech or Polish traditions and also what Deleuze referred to as the minor literatures that come up with abundant political force. It has been observed that the institutionalization of literary cultures in the East-Central Europe in the 19th century was deeply implicated in the formation and evolution of the nationalisms of the countries as well. (the East-central Europe as we know had been a state-less territory till the hegemonic ideologies of Nazism and Communism came up and these regions also had a rich tradition of folk literature unlike Western Europe) The idea Europe, it is fairly argued today, as something discerned in the flux of history, could be found as a product of conflicts rather than consensus (Delanty). In fact, the fault line within the proposed unity is revealed through the deviating narratives that emerge as moments for debate leading to the

perceiving of multiple voices. But for most European writers, the hegemony of an imposed Europeanness could be challenged only by imagining the non-Europe as an other, and not by looking into its own multiplicity. One can remember for instance, that when European thought called for a death of God, it was the demise of a Judo Christian God and Nietzsche's counterpoint drew heavily from an allegorization of Zarathustra.

In post-war European literature, the collective nationalized identity concept was desacralized from all quarters, be it the national imperial citizen, the cultured European, the manly male or the spiritual feminine—all that had been part of the deep-rooted and honored myths of self-hood behind the idea of Europe. The works of Herman Hesse, Robert Musil or Franz Kafka blatantly challenged the myths of the pre-war modernism. The movement henceforth was from a collective notion of Europe to a decentralized, nationalized, localized ideas of fragmented cultures. But each of these nationalisms did in fact partake from the hegemonic, constructed Europeanness and the National awakening in East European nations showed a literary phenomenon that coexisted, mingled and formed hybrids, giving local meaning and colors to Western Literary terms like Classicism, Romanticism or Realism. Simultaneously, the post-colonial literary narratives almost invariably turned to the Eastern European traditions as a lost exotica.

Lastly, consider a specific contemporary literary use of the Europa myth: John Berger's *Once in Europa* the second part of the trilogy *Into the Labors* (1980s). Berger's protagonists are migrant workers in Europe. To speak of the political displacement and urban poverty, Berger uses the very same myth of Europa, which also could be read as one of displacement, homelessness, the desolate silences of wandering people which the historical memory of nations are 'obliged to forget'. The emigrant barracks in which Berger's heroine Odile Blanc lives is nicknamed 'Europa' and it was for no reason. The image of Europa barracks is a stark deviation from the earlier narratives on the myth, marking the peasant's transition to worker, the thoroughly de-localized life of the migrant industrial worker. The myth of Europa, as Berger finds it, is also the myth of migration, movement, uprooting and the basic contradiction that a migrant life places over the idea of nation. Berger's Europa is politically displaced and the myth becomes one of rape of unnamed worlds and unknown alliances. The myth that took shape more than two thousand years ago has more in it if we seek to know why a continent should be named after it. Of thousands of myths in the Greek corpus, it is the name of a nymph who was of Asian birth and never even came to the land we now know as Europe, that is picked to represent the cultural past of the continent seems an interesting fact.

Mahabharata and Bharat

We may continue the paradoxical position of the migrants that we found in the contemporary European society as articulated in the reworking of Europa myth, to the history of certain local and folk traditions in India, as it is manifested in the renderings of

Mahabharata in a few cults and folklores in the interior north and south of India. Mahabharata, a long narrative that along with Ramayana is often grouped as an important National epic of India, 'quintessential of everything Indian' (Sanyal 197). Basically it tells the story of five pandava brothers and their hundred odd cousins, Kauravas, before, during and after the Kurukshetra war, a battle the kins fought over their ancestral realm. Though the epic is attributed to 'Vyasa', versions of Mahabharata stories recur throughout India in a wide variety of literary, performative, ritual and political contexts. This paper, when it refers to Mahabharata, do not refer to any one textualised version of it in Sanskrit or any other Indian language, but refers to both its retellings in Indian literature and the rich tradition of Mahabharata stories flourishing across a variety of socio-cultural contexts ranging from oral traditions, local temple myths, films and visual media, paying special attention to its importance in community building.

This epic was also, like Europa, used exorbitantly for nationalist purposes in colonial India. An instances of the use of the epic narrative Mahabharata in nation building could be spotted in Surendranath Banerjee's statement in 'The Study of Indian history', that echoes Paul Valéry's rhetoric about Europe. Banerjee exhorts Indians (aka Hindus to him) to recall the names of Valmiki and Vyasa along with Panini, Patanjali, Gautama and Sankaracharya to 'stimulate their patriotism, to increase their self-respect'. Banerjee who was ousted from civil service was radicalized by the colonial regime, but his statement echoes the desperate need of the Indian elite Nationalists to discover a cultural identity to be proud of. Many instances of considering the epic Mahabharata as a homogeneous narrative to include all of nation's cultural past could be spotted in nationalist discourses during the 'Swadeshi' movement. Alienated from the Western education through discrimination and from their own by the pulls of modernization, a patriotic response to nationalism through a glorious past was a means of restoring the injured identity of the intelligentsia of colonial India. The Swadeshi movement in this respect marks the period when a specific national subjectivity was invented in India. The Mahabharata retellings that concentrated in the spatial locale of the invention, the Avadh region and the United Provinces, were largely molded to this effect. Akshaya Mukul in his phenomenal work on Gita Press recently brings out how the resurgence of the movement for Hindi in opposition to Urdu (the khari boli campaign) as a symbol of cultural nationalism, sprang up with a consolidation of Marwari capital in the Avadh region and the growth of print media.

The Hindi retellings of the Mahabharata during the khari boli campaign of the early twentieth century, Sachitra Mahabharata of Mahavirprasad Dwivedi (1908), Maithili saran Gupt's poem Jayadrath Vadh (1910), Bhadrinath Bhatt's Kuruvan Dahan (1912), Narayana Prasad Betab's play Mahabharata (1913) Radheshyam Katavachak's Vir Abhimanyu (1916) and Ramacharit Upadhyay's Devi Draupadi (1920) to name just a few were all written in tune with the nationalist need for revival of an imagined past.

(Lothspeich) Notably, in this period of Hindu/Hindi ethnic revival, embedded in the politics of nationalism, the pre-nationalist tradition of Mahabharata readings influenced by the Urdu and Brajbasha were replaced by a fervor of heroism (the character Abhimanyu was a popular ideal among patriots). Both Urdu inspired 'little kings' tradition and the Brajbasha's erotic treatment were rejected as spineless. In her detailed study of Mahabharata of Hindu Nationalist revival, Pamela Lothspeich points to how the character of Draupadi came to be depicted as Mother India, not just repeatedly stripped and violated, but more as compassionate and pardoning (even Ashwattama, the murderer of her sons). She is never once the furious, scheming vengeful and charming Draupadi of the pre-nationalist traditions of Bhrajbasha. Kabi Sanjay's medieval Bengali Mahabharata, on the other hand had Draupadi leading a force of Kuru-Pandava women against Drona after he kills her son, Abhimanyu. The inspiration for the Khari Boli writers were Bankimchand Chatopadhyay's Anandmath and Krishnacharita. They rejected the Urdu retellings as foreign (Persian) and Bhrajbasha retellings as spineless and erotic. Even the Vrindavan scenes, the staple diet of Bhrajbasha were completely rejected. Parallely in the South there was the apotheosis of Draupadi as 'Bharatmata' with Tamil laurette Subrahmanya Bharati's *Panchali sapadham*.

Notably the Hindu nationalist discourse that was formulated by upper-caste ideologues as a form of cultural resistance to British Colonialism, followed a method of appropriation, homogenizing of the heterogeneous oral traditions of the myth (Thapar). Textualisation of Indian tradition, has been observed to be a legacy of the predominantly colonial conception about the primacy of script. 'Textualisation' points to an established concern for singular, authoritative texts evidently part of the Protestant formation of European enlightenment. (Sweetman). Both the colonial state and its elite nationalist subjects took extreme caution to abide by the authority of the written form rather than to delve into the complexities of the oral narrative traditions. The first attempts of textualising any singular Sanskrit texts- Bhagavat Gita by Charles wilkins, Gita govinda and Manusmriti by William jones, Max Mullers iconic critical edition of Rig veda samhita, all point to an established concern for singular, authoritative text that is evidently part of the Protestant formation. At some significant and evident points the interests and perspectives of the literate Brahmana and the colonial masters merged so conveniently for the national cause that recent scholarship even identifies colonialism as a significant factor in the 'brahmanization' of narrative traditions. Identification of a textual basis for Hinduism was part of the Orientalist interest, classical education and Protestant formation of most of the Company servants. (Sweetman). For both the European orientalist and the Bhrahmanic Nationalist, it was pertinent to instill an idea of decline of 'pure' religion to which the community has to aspire back. Propounding of Advaita Vedanta 'as the paradigmatic example of the mystical nature of the Hindu religion' is also part of the same confluence of European orientalist idealism and Bhrahmanic supremacy.

Contrary to the larger nationalistic purposes of these tellings in literature and Nationalist narratives, there is a tradition of reciting Mahabharata, especially episodic selection of the narrative in local cultures from north in the Himalayas to the southern Tamilnadu and Kerala. There are temples of Duryodhana in Malanada in Kollam district of Kerala, of Karna in Garwal and there is a rich tradition of Draupadi worshipped as goddess in various parts of Tamilnadu. It has been argued that most of the temple traditions have a supporting system of oral rendering of recensions of the epic that were determinant in the formation of the cult. The Draupadi cult, for instance is supported by the popular Tamil renderings of Mahabharata that were recited during the period of Mamalla, the Pallava king in 600 CE. Draupadi is here the lady of Genchii or Kanchi and has no Avadh origins. The myth exists in an intensely transgressive terrain here with locally specific intensions. Tracing the myths' centuries of evolving, Hiltebeitel observes how the "living" Indian folk interpretation of the epic provides a counterweight, and even correctives, to some of the prevailing views of the Mahabharata held since the 1850s by a predominantly western, classically oriented scholarship.

The Hindu nationalist discourse that was formulated by upper-caste ideologues as a form of cultural resistance to British Colonialism includes notions like that of 'mother India', an essentialist difference between what is believed to be 'a materialist west' and 'a spiritual east' that accelerated to public acceptance historically in a period of slumber between the assassination of Gandhi and the political ascendancy of Hindu militancy in the 70s. The discourse of Ramarajya as a utopian traditional community was appropriated as a national agenda. A significant method of this kind of appropriation is a homogenizing of the heterogeneous oral traditions of the myth, exclusion of the folk traditions and negation of the critical heterodox interpretations (Thapar) The transnational telemythologies including the contemporary popularity of animated myths, that can be traced back to the immensely popular *Amar Chitra Katha* genre all point to the creation of dominant discourses by giving up the heterogeneity and complexity of myths. Most often the processes of unification of a given myth, its consolidation into one monolithic form has typical nationalistic and political agenda. Mass mediation of myths and epics through television, cinema and calendar art in India have been extensively looked upon in popular culture studies as detrimental to the intricate fabric of myths. The televised epics in Doordarshan are instances of certain essentialist notions of culture that encouraged viewers to equate religious identity with national identity. Externally bordering on a farce of secularism, this homogenization of myths into the dominant discourses is also evidently arbitrary. There are also many sporadic Hindu nationalist discourses coming up rapidly that try to establish an essentialised Brahmana identity to every mythical character and validate their regional and temporal attributes as historical specificities. At a time when certain spatio-temporal variants of mythical heterodox is even given judicial validity by nation states, such extremely unfounded readings could be rejected if once we

could dissociate mythscapes from history, to read and understand myths as distributed stories of cultural formation.

While popular representations of myths remain anti-democratic we may also note an inherent democracy of narratives in folk, nomadic, oral and other subcultural tradition. Consider the intricacy within the mythical structure of Mahabharata. Most cults of worship based on Mahabharata are originally strong ideological rebellions against the imposing of a monolithic dominant narrative. The folk tradition of worshiping the sub-characters like Karna or Ekalavya forces us to think radically about the power structures that prevailed. The stories of Ekalavya and Sambuka came to prominence from time to time during Dalit awakenings and rebellions. The myth of Parasuram related to the origin of the southern state Kerala was re-read as a myth of Brahmanisation of a land by the killing of indigeneous groups. Mahabharata's typical conventional readings that exempt the cult and folk dimensions of the text, generally conceive it as a saga of the idea of 'dharma' which had been largely integral to the social structure of the late Vedic/ early Upanishad period (8-9 BCE) when the earliest texts of Mahabharata myth were supposed to come in to being from the thousands of existing tribal stories and Mesopotemian myths. The dharma ideology was also largely re-initiated and exploited in nationalist discourses of the 19th century as well. However the cult of Karna or Ekalavya point to a totally antithetical ideological base for the myth. The metamorphosis of these characters in the folk traditions points to the political and ideological debates between communities that could have been integral in the formation of the mythical structure itself. Karna's cult for instance worship him as a fallen hero, just as Mahabali in south.

There are interesting factors about the identification of the 'suras' or devas as good and asuras as demons/ bad in the Vedic Brahmanic traditions. There is an archeological parallel between the Zoroastrian liturgical text in old Iranian, Avesta, which is another cultural residue of proto Indo-Aryan language and Rigveda, the Sanskrit Vedic text. One linguistic parallel, according to Romila Thapar is illuminating to the cultural reduction that myths are vulnerable of and subjected to in their traverse across temporal and spatial expanses. Comparing Rigveda to the ancient Parsi scripture Avesta, Thapar observes how in Avesta the dasus are good and devas are represented as bad. In Avesta, the use of the particular word Daivas as against Ahuras or the Asuras of Sanskrit is strikingly reverse. If Daivas are the demons and Ahuras are gods in Avesta and if this split was pre-vedic, then the divisions based on colour or Varna would certainly be only what the texts gathered in subsequent periods. According to Thapar the myth of dark-skinned Dravidians as a pre existing indigenous tribe uprooted by Aryan invasion is thus a later narrative. There are many instances of the kind of cultural exchanges that took place between the migratory, pastoral Aryan tribes and the settled agrarian Dravidian groups in the myths, puranas and Vedas. There are also linguistic evidences for the same in Rigveda. For inst, the terms denoting agrarian tasks are non-aryan which suggests a

bilingual exchange between them, (and underscores an ‘invasion’ theory) and myths about inter-marriages between the tribes abound (Kacha –Devayani for inst) . The distinction between Aryans and Dravidians were thus not racial but linguistic, social and cultural. It is true that the distinctions got intermingled with social hierarchies, but it happened through subsequent interpretations of narratives, especially through a process that subjected narratives to politicization. The narrowing problem of morality came up only when narratives failed to conceive the ambivalence of mythical structure cumulatively, when they became monolithic and were used as mouthpieces of hegemonic power.

Conclusion

What Paula Richman terms ‘oppositional tellings’ of the dominant reading of myths, that oppose, cancel and explore the narratives evolving from the myth are significant occasions where democratizing forces within the social being of various communities, manifest themselves through narratives. Richman observes that such selective tellings –of those which adopt a non-traditional perspective on otherwise familiar features of the tale—have proved an effective means for conveying political views. If one could get rid of monolithic concepts of tradition, one could explore the democracy within the myth better. Commentators of myths, in their very selection of incidents and approaches to the narrative, reveal the political aim behind the hermeneutic process. Many a times what was regarded as minor incidents, what was removed from usual narrative contexts, suddenly spring up in a specific locale with a specific intend and the political pattern of this democratization is evident.

Selectivity is a power in narrative contexts. Many of the intriguing clauses of a myth, viewed in this manner, reveal as alternate possibilities that were exploited in various social contexts of the creation of the rhetoric. Myth is an eloquent language that lets one speak about the ambivalences in human situation, and democracy is always a trust in the ambivalence. Whenever a narrative lets one to be polemical, it also becomes a tool for political discourse within dominant narratives. Every larger picture reveals that wherever a hierarchy—social, political, religious or sexual—is affirmed, the same hierarchy is also contested within the narrative traditions of the myth. The folk traditions were predominantly rhetorical strategies that democratized mythscapes.

Works Cited:

Abulafia, D. “The EU is in thrall to a historical myth of European unity.” *The Telegraph*. 26 Feb 2015.

Banerjee, S. “Study of Indian History.” 1-11 in *Speeches and Writings of Surendranath Banerjee*. Madras: G. Nateson and Co. 1917

Bell, D.C. "Mythscapes: Memory, mythology and National Identity. *British Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 54 No. 1, 2003, pp. 63-81.

Berger, J. *Once in Europa*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Berger, S. "On the Role of Myths and history in the construction of national identity in Modern Europe." *European History Quarterly*. Vol.39 No. 3, 2009, pp.490-502

Bernal, M. *Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985*. Rutgers University press, 1987.

Bhabha, H. *Location of Cultures*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Chakrabarty, D. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. New Jersey. Princeton University Press. 2000.

Delanty, G. *Inventing Europe: Idea, identity, reality*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995.

Eliot, T S. "The Unity of European Culture" in *Christianity and Culture: The idea of a Christian Society and Notes toward a definition of Culture*. London: Harvest Book, 1976.

Hay, D. *Europe: The emergence of an idea*. London: University Press, 1957.

Hiltebeitel, A. *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Lothspeich, P. *Epic Nation-reimagining the Mahabharata in the age of the empire*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Manners, I. "Global Europa: Mythology of the European Union in World politics. *JCMS*, Vol. 48 No.1, 2010, pp. 67-87.

Mukul, A. *Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India*. Noida: UP. Harper Collins, India. 2015.

Richman,P. "Introduction." in Paula Richman (Ed.) *Many Ramayanas: Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1991.

Riekmann, S.P. "The Myth of European Unity." In Geoffrey Hosking and George Schopflin (Eds) *Myths and Nationhood*. New York. Routledge, 1997.

Rougemont, D. *The Meaning of Europe*. New York. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1965.

Said, E. *Freud and the Non-European*. London: Verso, 2003.

Sanyal, A.K. 'The wonder that is the Mahabharata'. *Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*. Vol. 57 No. 4, 2006, pp. 195–9.

Sweetman.W. "The prehistory of orientalism: colonialism and the textual basis for bartholomäus ziegenbalg's account of hinduism." *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* Vol.6 No.2, Dec, 2004, pp.12-38.

Thapar, R. *Interpreting Early India*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 1992.

Valéry, P. *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry: History and politics*. Trans by D. Folliot and J. Mathews. Princeton University Press, 1971.

Watt, M. *The influence of Islam in Medieval Europe*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1994.