Perspectives of Young Adolescents towards Ancient Mythology and Modern Myth-Fiction

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Abstract
This research paper is an account of how young adolescents react and respond to ancient mythology and myth fictions in the millennial age. It shows the perspectives through the voices of the students who are targeted audience for most of the modern myth fiction writers. The questions drew on ancient mythology and myth fictions were to engage the students in discussions, which built on their prior knowledge of mythology, concerns regarding their own cultures and the world beyond. The inferences and research findings show young students' reading habits, creative thinking or behaviour and exposure to myth genre. The survey also shows new ways of analysing students' experiences, personal reflections of reading mythology and myth related stories. In addition, this new approach acts as a catalyst to how to foster value education for young adolescents through mythology and myth fictions, which can be outlined as the future scope of research.

Keywords: Millennial, adolescents, perspectives, mythology, myth fictions, genre

I. Introduction

The age of innovation has the capacity to assign yesterday's inventions to oblivion. The increasing demand for novelty has burdened people in every field to keep updating and upgrading. While this has become an inevitable aspect of life, the need to be grounded to ones values and culture is also necessary. Human race thrives on interdependency and cohabitation. In an age which mandates individual identity and success, harmonious existence for humans is a challenge. The morals and values instilled through the various religious, philosophical and academic writings form the integral part of

any society. Progressive scientific knowledge warrants rethinking and rephrasing cultural and religious values of the past. It is believed that myth or mythology plays an important role.Dr. Padma MaliniSundararaghavan writes, "Myth is one word in the English language which inheres in itself two opposite meanings. A myth can embody the highest esoteric truth and it can mean a deliberate falsehood. We have myths in

practically every field of human activity, religion, politics, culture, history, literature, anthropology, psychology and even ideology. When ideology works like a religion, it acquires the characteristics of myth." (Sundararaghavan, 2013) [1]. Without infringing into the ongoing fiction.

II.   Methodology

"The need to observe or research facts about a situation leads us to conduct a survey." [2]. In light of observing the perspectives of young adolescents towards mythology, this survey was conducted and the results were analysed for the same. The sample group of students was chosen on the basis of age, family type (joint/nuclear), family values (orthodox/modern), reading patterns (academic/leisure), and use of technology for reading (paperback/e-book). The questionnaire was administered to the students through digital media and the responses were recorded.
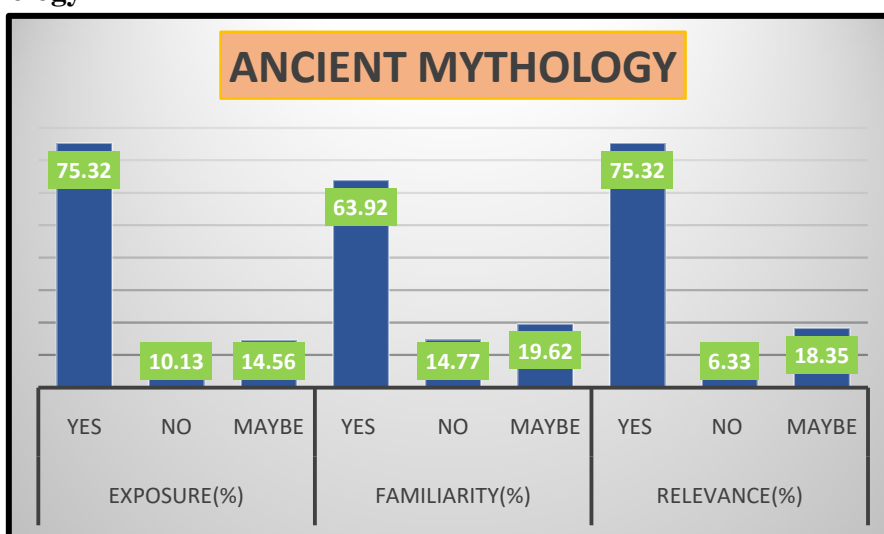
Questionnaire

The survey was conducted on a sample group of 79 children of Grades XI and XII at

debate, concerning effacing cultural values in light of scientific advancements, attempt is made to understand the stance of the young adolescents of modern times with respect to ancient mythology and modern myth-

Mahindra World School, Chengalpet, Tamil Nadu, India. A questionnaire consisting of 20 questions was administered to the students. The questionnaire evoked responses from students about their understanding on topics ranging from ancient mythology to modern myth fiction. The questions were phrased to answer from three options – 'yes', 'no' and 'may be'. Students' exposure to ancient mythological tales, source of exposure and relevance to ancient mythology on contemporary times could be assessed through this questionnaire. Also exposure to modern myth fiction, children's relatability to mythology and myth fiction, and impact of these myth fiction stories on youth were assessed. Student responses have been summed up and categorised into two broad segments – Ancient Mythology (Bar Graph 1) and Modern Myth-fiction (Bar Graph 2).

Ancient Mythology

Bar Graph 1: Exposure, Familiarity and Relevance – AncientMythology

From the Bar Graph 1, students' exposure to ancient mythological texts, their familiarity to mythical tales, and their opinion on relevance of ancient myth stories to present times can be analysed. Around 75% of students had read or heard mythological tales, with 10.13 denying it and 14.56 unsure about it.Answering specific question regarding the source of exposure for mythological tales, more than 50% students claimed to have been exposed to these tales at either school or home. Also, home or school happens to be a major source of information.

Students also display sufficient familiarity of mythical texts from different cultures, especially Indian mythology. While 64% of students show familiarity to mythological texts and tales, nearly 20% of students are unsure of the same, and 14.77% have no familiarity.
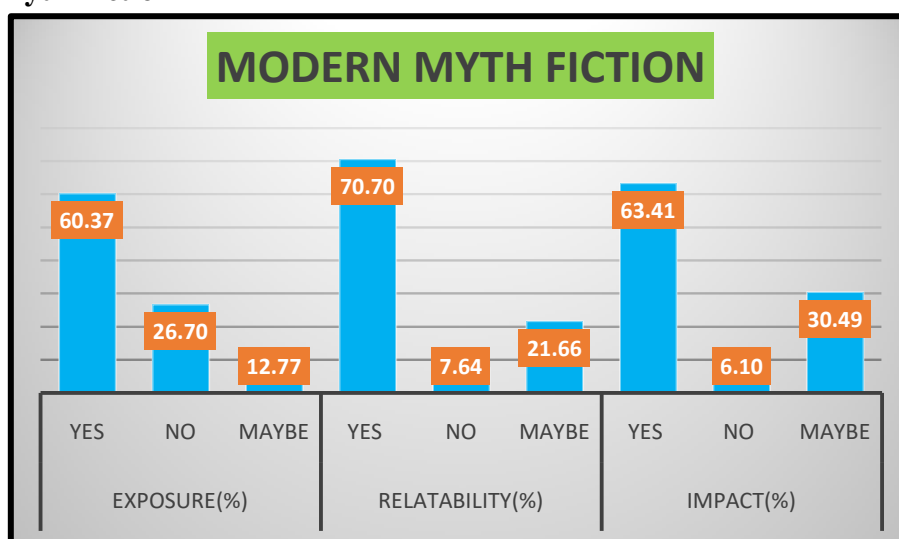
Answering questions related to relevance of mythology to youngsters, students feel that it is relevant to them and is not a term which holds importance for older generation alone.

Interestingly, 75.32% of students expressed this opinion echoing the percentage of students who are exposed to mythological contexts. In response to a question as to the relevanceof ancient mythology for modern and older generation, a significant 25% feel that mythology is not a thing for older generation alone but is relatable to younger generation also.

Inference – Ancient Mythology

It can be inferred from Bar Graph 1 that modern day children acknowledge their familiarity and exposure to various mythological texts/stories from either school or home.It can be safely presumed that students are indeed raised in an environment in which the cultural values implied by ancient mythological texts abound.Devdutt Pattanaik writes, "Myth is truth which is subjective, intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith" (xiii).(Pattanaik xiii, 2006)[3]. True to this statement, myth is imparted as part of the cultural and religious contexts in one's environment.

Modern Myth Fiction

Bar Graph 2: Exposure, Relatability and Impact – Modern Myth-Fiction

Bar Graph 2 analyses the exposure, relatability and impact with reference to modern

myth fiction writings and writers.Fiction, or novel, as a literary genre continues to appeal

people of all age group, including adolescents. Teenage happens to be the initiating point for most voracious readers. Henry James says, "… the novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms." [4]. Children display overall good exposure (60.37%) to modern myth-based writings with familiarity to authors like Amish Tripathi and Rick Riordan. The percentage of students not exposed to the same is a significant 26.70. While answering specific questions related to this, an impressive 60% of students acknowledged reading myth fiction stories and 62% displayed familiarity to authors like Amish Tripathi and Rick Riordan (one or both). Amish opined in an interview as follows, "My books are retelling of mythology from a modern viewpoint. They are deeplyIndian and speak of issues that go deep within the Indian identity in a way that today's audiences can relate to. The book was never just a story. The core of the book is its philosophy. That is the motivation for writing this book."(Tripathi, 2012)[5]. At the same time, a considerable number of students are not familiar with myth fiction writing and authors like Amish Tripathi and Rick Riordan with 32.9% claiming not to have read myth fiction and 24.1% not familiar with the authors mentioned.

Students have also been able to relate to the fictional stories based on mythology and appreciate the cultural heritage and value explicated by the original mythological texts.Stories about gods and goddess in the mythology of every culture project a larger-than-life image of their chivalrous deeds. They are inevitably part of literature but are made more appealing and relatable to modern audience by rehashing the literary genre as well as the story.As Northrope Fry rightly points out, "If superior in kind both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a myth in the common sense of a story about a god. Such stories have an important place in literature, but are as a rule found outside the normal literary categories."(Frye, 1957)[6]. Students (70.7%) have expressed ability to relate to myth fictional writings and developing appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of their culture. A small percentage (7.64) of students do not feel myth fictional writings will inculcate appreciation for one's cultural heritage, a sizeable (21.66) percentage are unsure of such an effect. Students also expressed that myth inspired tales will have an impact on youngsters and these tales will help build bridges between youngsters and their cultural roots. While 63.41% of students believe myth fiction will impact young audience and may help modern youth bridge gaps to their cultural roots, 30.49%are unsure if that is possible and a small percentage (6.10) ruling out this possibility.

Inference – Modern Myth Fiction

Overall it can be observed and understood that young adolescents show considerable exposure and familiarity to ancient mythological texts and tales.On the contrary, youngsters did not display similar exposure and familiarity to modern myth fiction. The oral inputs (from family) or visual inputs (from media) received for ancient mythology may play a significant role in sufficient knowledge and understanding of Indian mythological texts and tales. The largely academic reading habits of students could be a cause of decline in the percentage of students knowledgeable about modern myth-fiction writing and writers.

Factors Influencing Perceptions

Family (whether joint or nuclear) and external sources (like school, media) seem to afford a good exposure to mythological entities. From specific answers in the questionnaire, 78.5% of students opine that it is important for

youngsters to be knowledgeable about mythology, especially of their own culture, and 74.7% are inspired to read the original mythological tales of their culture.Therefore, it is necessary to find ways to provide adequate sources and resources for these. Arguably, myth fiction can be one such source. It is important to help youngsters identify the marked polarity between original mythological tales and myth-inspired fictional tales. The lacuna in reading habits with respect to leisure reading and non-use of e-books may be directly affecting the students' exposure to modern myth-fiction writings and writers. Use of e-books can be encouraged by highlighting the ease of accessibility of books and virtual assistance while reading. This may encourage students to opt for reading beyond academics.

III. Conclusion

Clearly, mythology is no toy for children. Nor is it a matter of archaic, merely scholarly concern, of no moment to modern men of action. For its symbols (whether in the tangible form of images or in the abstract forms of ideas) touch and release the deepest centres of motivation, moving literate and illiterate alike, moving mobs, moving civilizations. There is real danger, therefore, in the incongruity of focus that has brought the latest findings of technological research into the foreground of modern life, joining the world in a single community, while leaving the anthropological and psychological discoveries from which a commensurable moral system might have been developed in the learned publications where they first appeared. For surely it is folly to preach children who will be riding rockets to the moon a morality and cosmology based on concepts of the Good Society and of man's place in nature that were coined before the harnessing of the horse! (Campbell, 1960)[7].

Joseph Campbell, one of the most distinguished mythologist of our time has postulated that mythology plays a significant role in the lives of a modern man. In the above quote, he writes exposing children to mythology should be done with utmost care and it should not be taken lightly. Mythology offers immemorial imagination and young generation would accept gracefully the bounty of tales, even though they would be 'riding rockets to the moon.'

This survey is an attempt to understand few reading habits of young adolescents, especially their familiarity to myth fictions.

As Campbell rightly puts:

> For it is a fact that the myths of our cultures work upon us, where consciously or unconsciously, as energy-releasing, life-motivating and directing agents; so that even though our rational minds may be in agreement, the myths by which we are living or by which our fathers lived –can be driving us, at that very moment, diametrically apart. (Campbell, 1960)[7].

The survey clearly indicates that young adolescents are interested in reading myth fictions.The survey throws light on some important findings that students have inherited culturally oriented beliefs of their family or society they live in. In addition, it proves that myth genre is gaining popularity among young adolescents.

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