

## **Mythical elements in the poetry of Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra, A comparative study**

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### **Abstract:**

Myths embody universal knowledge of human civilization, which is not specified by time and history. They are accepted as the outcome of ancient rituals through which society's belief is expressed. Myths are symbols of man's aspiration, which provide him with ideas and help him to set goals in a hostile world threatening human existence. They provide man psychological support by assisting him in discriminating between good and evil judiciously. Man's history is codified in its myths, so myth brings realism to a literary work. According to Carl Jung, "If we are to see things in their proper perspective, we need to understand the past of man as well as the present. That is why an understanding of myths is of essential importance".<sup>1</sup> Myth is a well-known story used in the past to explain natural events or justify religious beliefs. Poetry and myth are interlinked with each other. From the ancient period, myths have been used in poetry. Renowned English poets like John Milton and T.S Eliot have employed myth abundantly in their poems "Paradise Lost" and "Waste Land."

**Keywords:** myth, mythology, psychological.

### **Introduction:**

Myth plays a significant role in modern Indian English poetry. Contemporary Indian English poetry almost deals with myth and tradition. The poets employ myth to distinguish between their society's present and past happenings.

Fantastical elements are extensively found in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra. The extensive use of myth reveals the poets' profound knowledge of our country's ancient mythology. The study attempts to compare the poetry of Ramanujan and Jayant Mahapatra to understand the significance of myth in their work to portray the contemporary lawless society.

### **Discussion:**

Ramanujan is a famous mythical poet in contemporary Indo-English poetry. His poetry is like a mirror in which one can see the face of Indian tradition. The poet's fascination for Hindu culture is revealed in his poetry. He attempts to portray the traditional glorious Indian culture and lament its extinction. Ramanujan's poetry reflects his passion for his beloved motherland.

Ramanujan is well versed in presenting Indian myth, which is well-

rooted in his poetry. The poet employs myth to glorify the ancient Indian culture while trying to perpetuate the link between the past and present. Most of his poems deal with a mythical theme. Ramanujan discovers the continuity of himself in myths. 'Quotes of God Shiva,' God Vishnu, 'God Krishna,' 'Lord Murugan,' etc., is found in his poetry.

In "A River," the poet explains the river as a helping and destructive force. The poem is a realistic presentation of the past and the present, myth, and culture. Ramanujan describes a flood as the symbol of destruction.

In verse about the pregnant woman  
Drowned with perhaps twins in her  
Kicking at the blank walls  
Even before birth. (28)

In "Mythology I," Mythology II, and Mythology III, Ramanujan tries to capture myth/ a thing of the past to show the continuity of his self from past to present. In 'Mythology1', the poet evokes the legend of Lord Krishna and Putana, based on the story of the cruel king of Mathura Kansa, the uncle of Lord Krishna. In 'Mythology11', Ramanujan highlights the myth of Lord Vishnu, the slayer of the tyrannical king *Hiranyakashipu*, the atheist father of Prahlad.

"Not to be slain by demons, god, or by  
beast, not by day nor by night,  
by no manufactured weapon, not out-  
of doors nor inside, not in the sky  
nor on earth".5T

Ramanujan's "Relations" is richer in mythical content and narration. According to him, desire is 'endless,' and a person prone to suicide must burn all his wishes, including *kama*. The poem directly mentions the legend of burning *Kamadeva*, the god of love and passion who Lord Shiva burned. The poet employs the myth in seven lines,

"Remember what the wise callous Hindus  
Said when the love-god burned: keep your  
cool,  
Make for love's shake no noble gesture  
All symbol, no limbs, a nobody, all soul,  
O kama, only you can have no use  
For the Kamasutra  
Ashes over no posture".1

Kamadeva's attempt to stir passion in Shiva during his meditation causes his death by burning. Latter, the heavenly marriage between Shiva and Parvati results in the birth of Kartikeya, who murders Tarakasura in a fierce battle. Ramanujan has marvelously intertwined the Kamadeva-Shiva myth with the Parvati-Shiva myth to emphasize the futility of desire. According to Hindu Mythology, Shiva performed the destructive dance when the dooms day was about to come. Hindus believe that after the deluge caused by Shiva, Brahma reconstructs the world to start a new era.

"Prayer to Lord Murugan" is composed of Dravidian God Murugan, the god of fertility, joy, youth, and beauty, having twelve hands. The Lord has been portrayed in eleven stanzas." Second Sight" abounds in Hindu myth, and the poem depicts the

love affair and reunion of Dushyanta and Sakuntala.

“The one well-timed memorable fish  
So one can cut straight with the actual knife  
To the ring waiting in the belly,  
And recover at one stroke all lost  
memory”.<sup>2</sup>

In "Zoo Gardens Revisited," Ramanujan explains the lack of sympathy of human beings towards innocent creatures. The poet invokes various gods to protect the innocent animals and alludes to various incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

“Lord of lion's face, boar snout and fish eyes, killer of the killer  
Cranes, shepherd of rampant elephants,  
devour my limbs,  
Devour them whole, save them in the zoo  
garden ask of your belly”.<sup>3</sup>

“Lord of Lion's face” explains Lord Vishnu's incarnation in the shape of Half-man and Half-lion and his protection of the world from the oppression of *Hiranyakashipu*. The 'boar snout' indicates the Lord's incarnation in the body of a *varha* who saves the earth from the demon by lifting it from deep water. The image of the Lord in the form of *mascara* who saves Manu from the deluge is also mentioned.

In “One more in a deathless Theme’, Ramanujan refers to the *Ardhanarishwar* concept of Hindu mythology. Since God Shiva accepts Parvati as one half of his body, the poet portrays Him as Half-man and Half-woman.

In "A Minor Sacrifice," Ramanujan relates the story of King Parikshit and his son Janmenjay who vows vengeance and prepares a sacrifice. Raja Parikshit kills a snake while snakebite kills hunting. His son Janmenjay performs the snake holocaust to avenge the snakes. Every snake leaps into the altar of the sacrificial fire and gets burnt.

“That draws every snake from everywhere,  
Tills snakes of every stripe-  
Begin to fall  
Through the blazing air  
Into his altar fires”.<sup>4</sup>

“Striders” manifests Ramanujan's belief in the unbelievable power of *yoga*, which has been a part of Indian life and tradition since the Vedic days.

In “Moulting," the poet invokes the Lord of snakes Garuda to get the blessings of security for his son.

“Lord of snakes and eagles, and everything  
in between, cover  
My son with an hour's shade and be the  
thorn at a suitable height  
His hour of change”.<sup>6</sup>

In "A Devotee's Complaint," Ramanujan mentions the name of three Hindu deities, Laxmi, Saraswati, and Shiva, and the way of worshipping them.

Jayant Mahapatra's poetry reflects the ancient Hindu myths and their preaching. His poems are woven around myth, and he presents it in the national spirit. The poet believes that myths are

always part and parcel of this earth. He skillfully uses myth to give a broader appeal to the eternal problems of humanity by shaping the mythological symbols into new forms and placing them in a contemporary context. Myths appear on both social and cultural levels in his poetry. Jayant Mahapatra uses myth to focus on the present degradation of human life.

In "Myth," the poet feels that any attempt to unravel the mystery of myth would render it powerless.

"I dare not to go  
 Into the dark, dark sanctum  
 Where the myth shifts  
 Swiftly from hand to hand, eye to eye. (13)  
 Mahapatra portrays the river Ganga in these lines,  
 Yet there is the river  
 It catches unaware  
 A Ganga  
 Desolated with histories of ashes  
 Like a mist of enchantments". 9

Here 'Histories of ashes' signifies the personal history of every dead. It also means the diverse histories of countless generations which pay their homage to the Ganga for salvation. In this way, the poet highlights today's mythical power of the river.

In "Relationship," the poet deals with the myth of the universe's origin and the myth of man's head on this planet. The poet reminds his readers about the heroic past of Odisha and reveres the famous heroes of the past. He refers to the river Daya which has witnessed the heroic deeds

of our ancestors, having a mythic dimension.

In "Rain of Rites," the poet describes people carrying the clay image of the goddess more by habit than devotion.

"The ten-armed clay Durga  
 Framed in a mythic past  
 Carried slowly twenty-four tired men". (26)

Mahapatra sees the erotic scriptures carved on the outer temple walls telling of man-woman relationships, Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha, etc., which he vividly portrays in The Sun Temple in Konark. The poet employs myth to perform the past when they were carved. Iyengar comments, "No true poet can escape from tradition, for all our yesterdays are involved in the poet's deeper consciousness, and no true poet can escape the process of the present, for he is in it and of it and the best he can do is to relate the immediate present to the living past."

Bruce King observes, "Mahapatra's persona is an estranged, destined, sensitive artist rather than an invisible or playfully prominent post-modernist author. As in post-modernist writers, there is less importance on the material world and more on subjective memory and the inner self. The psychological in contrast to the post-modernist emphasis on almost self-enclosed forms".

#### **Conclusion:**

Using myth in a literary work reveals the writer's idea about the social and cultural background of the environment in which he lives. Besides, the employment of myth enables him to bring resemblance and

contrast between past and present events. It also helps the writer to expand his ideas in his work realistically. Using myth in poetry, the poets have revived the old forgotten myths of India. So, the importance of myth in a literary work can't be denied.

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2- Ibid., p126

3- Ibid., p144

4- Ibid., p221

5- Ibid., p226

6- Ibid., p176

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