



## Myth as Cultural Memory: Rewriting Indian Epics in Post-Millennial English Fiction through Memory Studies

Dr Balaji Baburao Shelke<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr Umeshkumar Murlidhar Bagal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, SRM University Sikkim, Sikkim, India. Email-balajibshelke@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dnyandeep College of Science and Commerce, Morvande-Boraj, Dist- Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, India. [Email-umesh.bagal@gmail.com](mailto:Email-umesh.bagal@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This paper examines post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction as a dynamic practice of cultural memory rather than merely a revival of epic narrative, popular genre fiction, or historical fantasy. Drawing on Cultural Memory Studies—particularly the theoretical interventions of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann—the study conceptualizes contemporary rewritings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as mnemonic sites where collective remembrance is preserved, reinterpreted, and transmitted in response to present socio-cultural and ideological conditions. Situating its analysis within the critical framework articulated by Soni, the paper argues that post-millennial mythological fiction marks a significant shift in Indian English writing from postcolonial historiography towards an inward engagement with indigenous civilizational memory.

Through close textual analysis of selected works by Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, and Ashok Banker, the study demonstrates how these narratives mediate between canonical epic memory and archival reinterpretation. By foregrounding ethical ambiguity, humanizing divine figures, recuperating marginalized perspectives, and rationalizing the supernatural, contemporary epic retellings destabilize singular moral authority and collapse rigid distinctions between myth and history. These narrative strategies align with Hayden White's theory of narrative emplotment, foregrounding the constructed nature of both mythic and historical knowledge.

The paper further contends that the relocation of epic narratives into popular English-language fiction constitutes a process of memory democratization, enabling cultural memory to circulate beyond ritualistic, religious, and scholarly domains. Writing myth in English is read not as cultural dilution but as a strategic act of transcultural memory transmission that facilitates the global circulation of Indian cultural memory while retaining its symbolic core. Ultimately, the study positions post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction as a living archive—one that sustains epic traditions through preservation, transformation, and transmission—thereby affirming its significance as a vital literary and cultural practice in twenty-first-century India.

**Keywords:** Cultural Memory, Indian English Fiction, Mythology, Post-Millennial Literature, Memory Studies, Indian Epics, Popular Fiction, Transcultural Memory, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Ashok Banker

### Introduction

Indian mythology has historically functioned not merely as a body of sacred narratives but as a dynamic cultural archive through which social values, ethical codes, cosmological beliefs, and collective identities have been preserved and transmitted across generations. Far from being static or obsolete, myth in the Indian context has remained a living and adaptive mode of cultural expression, continuously reinterpreted through oral traditions, ritual practices, performative forms, visual arts, and literary texts. The great epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—occupy a foundational position in the Indian cultural imagination, operating simultaneously as religious scriptures, moral-philosophical treatises, socio-political commentaries, and repositories of collective memory. These epics have historically shaped ideas of *dharma*, kingship, kinship, gender roles, violence, and ethical responsibility, rendering them central to India's civilizational consciousness.

Myths in the Indian tradition are rarely understood as fictional fabrications in the modern Western sense; rather, they are perceived as “jumbled memories of a true past,” preserving symbolic and metaphorical truths rather than empirically verifiable historical facts. This conception resonates with indigenous epistemological categories such as *smṛti*, *itiḥāsa*, and *purāṇa*, which function as mnemonic frameworks rather than archival history. Myth, in this sense, does not stand in opposition to history but operates as a cultural technology of remembrance, enabling societies to remember what is ethically, socially, and spiritually significant. Such an understanding aligns with Amish Tripathi's assertion that mythology encodes deeper civilizational truths that transcend factual accuracy, offering ethical and philosophical insight rather than documentary history (Tripathi, 2015). Myth thus functions less as a record of what happened and more as a narrative articulation of what continues to matter.

The post-millennial phase of Indian English fiction has witnessed a significant resurgence of mythological narratives, particularly from the early 2000s onward. Writers such as Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik, and Ashwin Sanghi have revisited and reimagined epic traditions for contemporary English-speaking audiences,

transforming ancient narratives into accessible modern prose. This literary phenomenon marks a decisive departure from the dominant concerns of earlier Indian English writing, which largely foregrounded colonial history, nationalism, diaspora, exile, and identity formation. Post-millennial mythological fiction reflects a turn away from colonial trauma towards an inward engagement with indigenous cultural resources, signalling a renewed interest in civilizational memory and cultural self-definition.

This resurgence must be situated within the broader socio-economic and ideological context of post-liberalization India. Economic reforms initiated in the 1990s resulted in rapid globalization, urbanization, and the emergence of a confident English-educated middle class. While globally connected, this readership simultaneously sought cultural rootedness and historical continuity in an era of accelerated change. The renewed popularity of mythological narratives coincides with the rise of this English-reading audience, for whom mythological fiction becomes a site where the tensions between tradition and modernity, global and local, past and present are negotiated. Reading itself thus becomes a participatory act of cultural memory.

Importantly, post-millennial retellings do not merely reproduce canonical versions of myth. Instead, they reinterpret epic narratives through humanized characters, rationalized cosmologies, ethical ambiguity, and alternative perspectives. Gods appear as fallible, heroes as morally conflicted, and villains as ethically legible figures. Such narrative strategies align with Hayden White's (1987) assertion that all historical narratives involve emplotment and interpretation, reinforcing the idea that both history and myth are constructed through narrative choices. Mythological fiction, therefore, foregrounds plurality and contestation, transforming epic memory into a flexible cultural discourse rather than a fixed sacred inheritance.

The rationale of the present study lies in reading post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction not merely as historical fiction, fantasy, or popular literature, but as sites of cultural memory. While existing scholarship has productively examined these texts through postcolonial theory, New Historicism, genre studies, and ideological critique, the dimension of memory remains underexplored. Cultural Memory Studies—particularly as articulated by Jan Assmann (2011) and Aleida Assmann (2010)—offer a productive framework for understanding how societies remember their past through texts, narratives, and symbolic forms. From this perspective, myth functions as a cultural memory system that preserves shared meanings while allowing reinterpretation.

Applying Memory Studies allows to examine how post-millennial mythological fiction actively remembers, reconfigures, and sometimes silences aspects of the epic past in response to contemporary ethical and ideological concerns. These narratives mediate between what Aleida Assmann terms the canon—stabilized, authoritative memory—and the archive, which enables reinterpretation, revision, and renewal (Assmann, 2010). By rewriting epics in English for modern audiences, contemporary authors transform sacred memory into accessible cultural discourse, ensuring continuity through adaptation.

Moreover, viewing mythological fiction as cultural memory challenges rigid distinctions between “popular” and “serious” literature. Popularity does not diminish cultural significance; rather, mass circulation enhances mnemonic power by enabling repeated engagement and wide transmission. In this sense, post-millennial mythological fiction functions as a democratic mnemonic medium that sustains cultural memory beyond ritualistic or scholarly domains. By situating post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction within Cultural Memory Studies, this paper argues that these narratives function as mnemonic spaces where cultural memory is preserved, contested, and reimagined. Myth emerges not as a static inheritance but as a living, adaptive archive that continues to shape contemporary identity, ethics, and cultural imagination in twenty-first-century India.

### **Research Problem**

Despite the growing visibility of Indian mythological fiction, academic engagement with post-millennial epic retellings remains fragmented and uneven. These works are frequently dismissed as commercial or genre fiction and excluded from serious literary consideration. While approaches such as New Historicism, postcolonial theory, and ideological critique have yielded valuable insights, they often privilege power, politics, and historiography over memory as a cultural process. Existing scholarship predominantly:

- Focuses on genre classification,
- Examines ideological revisionism,
- Reads myth through postcolonial or historicist frameworks.

What remains insufficiently explored is how mythological fiction functions as cultural memory—how narratives mediate between canon and archive, how remembrance and forgetting operate, and how epic memory is transformed into accessible cultural discourse. The absence of Memory Studies in this field constitutes a significant critical lacuna, which this study addresses.

### **Research Objectives and Research Questions**

#### Research Objectives

- To examine post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction as a form of cultural memory.
- To analyse how epic narratives are selectively remembered, revised, and recontextualised.
- To explore the transformation of myth from sacred canon to cultural archive.
- To investigate the relationship between memory, identity, and ideology.
- To reposition popular mythological fiction within academic literary discourse.

### Research Questions

- How do post-millennial mythological novels function as sites of cultural memory?
- How do these narratives negotiate between canonical myth and contemporary concerns?
- How do remembering and forgetting shape epic rewritings?
- What role does popular mythological fiction play in constructing collective cultural identity?

### Significance of the Study

This study contributes to literary scholarship by offering one of the first sustained applications of Cultural Memory Studies to post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction. Theoretically, it extends memory studies beyond Eurocentric trauma paradigms by engaging with Indian epic traditions. Culturally, it demonstrates how contemporary retellings sustain civilizational continuity while enabling ethical reinterpretation. Practically, it legitimizes popular mythological fiction as a powerful mnemonic form shaping collective consciousness.

### Scope and Limitations

#### Scope

- Focuses on post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction (2003 onwards).
- Examines selected texts including Amish Tripathi's *Ram Chandra Series*, Anand Neelakantan's *Asura* and *Ajaya*, and Ashok Banker's *Ramayana Series*.
- Employs Cultural Memory Studies as the primary framework.

#### Limitations

- Excludes regional-language retellings and visual adaptations.
- Does not conduct empirical reader-response analysis.

### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative methodology suited to cultural memory analysis. Textual and thematic analysis are employed to examine how narratives construct remembrance, revision, and transmission. Memory Studies is chosen over purely historicist approaches because it foregrounds how the past is remembered, not merely how it is represented. Method and theory are thus integrated, reflecting established practices in literary memory studies.

### Analysis and Interpretation

#### Mythological Fiction as a Cultural Memory Practice

Post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction may be most productively understood not merely as a literary trend, market-driven genre revival, or nostalgic return to tradition, but as a cultural memory practice—a narrative mode through which collective remembrance is preserved, negotiated, and transmitted across time. Such an understanding moves beyond reductive classifications of mythological fiction as escapist fantasy or commercial literature and instead situates it within the broader theoretical framework of Cultural Memory Studies. Drawing on Jan Assmann's (2011) foundational distinction between *communicative memory* and *cultural memory*, post-millennial epic retellings emerge as long-term mnemonic structures that extend far beyond lived social interaction and individual recollection.

Communicative memory, as Assmann explains, is limited to the experiential horizon of living generations—approximately eighty to one hundred years—and is sustained through everyday interaction, oral exchange, and personal testimony. Cultural memory, by contrast, is preserved through durable symbolic forms such as texts, rituals, monuments, images, and narratives that stabilize shared meanings across centuries. Indian epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have historically functioned precisely in this latter capacity. They operate not as factual historiography in the modern empirical sense, but as civilizational memory systems that encode ethical values, social norms, political ideals, and cosmological worldviews. Their authority derives not from historical verifiability but from their mnemonic centrality within Indian cultural consciousness.

Within the Indian epistemological tradition, myth is not understood as fictional invention or imaginative fabrication, but rather as a sedimentation of remembered truths—often described as “jumbled memories of a true past” that preserve symbolic and moral significance rather than empirical accuracy. This conception resonates deeply with indigenous categories such as *smṛti* (that which is remembered) and *itihāsa* (“thus it happened”), both of which foreground remembrance, moral meaning, and cultural continuity over archival documentation. Myth, therefore, functions as a legitimate mode of remembering, not as a deviation from history but as an alternative form of historical consciousness. From this perspective, the binary opposition between myth and history collapses, giving way to a continuum of narrative memory.

Post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction inherits this mnemonic function while simultaneously reconfiguring it for contemporary cultural conditions. Rather than merely reproducing canonical narratives, contemporary writers reinterpret epic memory through modern ethical frameworks, psychological realism, and narrative experimentation. In Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy*, for instance, the figure of Shiva is radically reimagined not as a transcendent, preordained deity but as a tribal leader whose divinity emerges through ethical action, social reform, and moral choice (Tripathi, 2010). Shiva's journey from an outsider chieftain to the Mahadev is framed as a process of ethical becoming rather than divine revelation. This narrative shift transforms mythic memory from divine transcendence into ethical humanism, allowing cultural memory to align with contemporary values such as leadership accountability, social justice, and individual agency.

Tripathi's Shiva does not command authority by virtue of supernatural origin alone; instead, he earns it through decision-making, sacrifice, and moral struggle. In memory-theoretical terms, this represents a shift from ritual repetition to narrative reinterpretation as the primary mechanism of remembrance. Cultural memory here is not passively inherited but actively reactivated, reshaped to address modern ethical concerns while retaining symbolic continuity with the epic past.

Similarly, Ashok Banker's *Ramayana Series* functions as a mnemonic re-mediation of epic memory through the conventions of popular fantasy and historical realism. Banker's detailed psychological portrayal of characters such as Rama, Kaikeyi, and Ravana reframes epic figures as historically plausible agents rather than mythic absolutes (Banker, 2002). Rama emerges not merely as an embodiment of idealized dharma but as a conflicted prince navigating political responsibility, familial obligation, and personal doubt. Kaikeyi is no longer reduced to a stock villain but is endowed with emotional complexity and political motivation. Ravana, likewise, is depicted as a formidable ruler shaped by ambition, intellect, and trauma.

By embedding epic memory within recognizable narrative forms—psychological depth, political intrigue, and military realism—Banker ensures that myth remains cognitively and emotionally accessible to contemporary readers. This accessibility is crucial from a cultural memory perspective: memory survives not through sanctity alone, but through circulation, repetition, and affective engagement. Banker's retellings thus exemplify how popular fiction can function as a powerful mnemonic medium, sustaining epic memory through narrative immersion rather than ritual authority.

Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya* series pushes this reconfiguration of cultural memory further through radical perspectival inversion. By narrating the *Mahabharata* from the viewpoint of the Kauravas, Neelakantan challenges the moral hierarchy embedded in canonical memory and exposes the politics of remembrance itself (Neelakantan, 2013). Figures traditionally remembered as villains—Duryodhana, Karna, and Shakuni—are re-presented as ethically complex individuals shaped by exclusion, injustice, and structural bias. In doing so, Neelakantan foregrounds the selective nature of cultural memory, revealing how canonical narratives privilege certain voices while marginalizing others.

These texts function as what Aleida Assmann (2010) describes as sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*)—narrative spaces where the past is not passively preserved but actively reconstructed through selection, emphasis, and ethical interrogation. Memory, in this sense, becomes a contested terrain rather than a fixed inheritance. Neelakantan's work demonstrates that remembering is always an interpretive act shaped by power relations, ideological frameworks, and narrative authority.

This reconfiguration marks a crucial shift in the social location of myth. Traditionally, epic memory circulated through ritual recitation, oral performance, temple iconography, and religious pedagogy—spaces governed by institutional authority and hierarchical transmission. Post-millennial retellings relocate myth into the domain of popular print culture, transforming sacred memory into accessible cultural discourse. This shift coincides with the rise of an English-educated middle class seeking cultural rootedness while negotiating global modernity. Mythological fiction thus becomes a democratized mnemonic medium, enabling epic memory to circulate beyond ritual and scholarly elites into everyday reading practices.

In this context, post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction does not signal the dilution of tradition but its adaptive survival. By functioning as a cultural memory practice, these narratives ensure that myth remains a living archive—capable of preservation, transformation, and transmission—within an increasingly plural, globalized, and ethically complex world.

### Rewriting the Epic: From Canon to Archive

Aleida Assmann's (2010) influential distinction between canon and archive offers a powerful conceptual framework for interpreting post-millennial rewritings of Indian epics. The canon refers to stabilized, authoritative memory—texts and narratives that are ritually repeated, institutionally sanctioned, and culturally revered. In the Indian context, canonical versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have historically occupied this privileged mnemonic space, functioning as moral exemplars and civilizational touchstones. Their authority has been sustained through religious pedagogy, ritual recitation, performative traditions, and institutional endorsement, producing a relatively stable moral universe structured around binaries such as dharma and adharma, hero and villain, divine and demonic.

The archive, by contrast, consists of marginal, suppressed, or alternative memories that remain culturally available but lack institutional authority. These include minor characters, antagonists, silenced voices, and ethical ambiguities that canonical memory either excludes or simplifies in the service of narrative coherence and moral clarity. Importantly, as Assmann (2010) argues, the archive is not a repository of falsehoods but a reservoir of *potential meanings*—memories that can be reactivated when cultural conditions demand reinterpretation. Post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction consistently enacts a movement from canon to archive, retrieving these marginalized perspectives and reintegrating them into contemporary cultural memory.

Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* exemplifies this archival recovery with particular clarity. By narrating the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of the Kauravas, Neelakantan recuperates Duryodhana from the margins of epic memory, presenting him not as a one-dimensional embodiment of adharma but as a principled ruler constrained by caste hierarchies, political exclusion, and inherited injustice (Neelakantan, 2013). Duryodhana's resistance to the Pandavas is framed not as moral depravity but as a response to a social order that systematically privileges lineage and divine sanction over merit. In this retelling, canonical victory is exposed as retrospective moral legitimization, suggesting that epic memory is shaped as much by power as by virtue.

This narrative strategy foregrounds the politics of remembrance, revealing how canonical memory constructs moral authority by silencing alternative ethical positions. Neelakantan's Duryodhana becomes an archival figure whose story

destabilizes the moral certainty of the canon without dismantling it entirely. The canon remains culturally central, but it is no longer uncontested. Instead, epic memory becomes plural, dialogic, and ethically complex.

A similar archival intervention operates in Neelakantan's *Asura*, where Ravana is reimagined as a visionary ruler and cultural reformer rather than a demonic antagonist. The text challenges the rigid binary opposition between divine hero and demonic villain by revealing Ravana's demonization as a product of Brahmanical memory politics, rather than intrinsic moral corruption. Ravana's resistance to Aryan dominance, his commitment to material progress, and his ethical autonomy position him as an alternative civilizational figure whose memory has been suppressed by canonical discourse. This reframing exposes myth not as neutral inheritance but as a contested narrative shaped by ideological selection.

Ashok Banker's retellings also activate the archive, though through a different narrative strategy. Rather than radically inverting perspective, Banker humanizes characters traditionally remembered through moral shorthand. Kaikeyi, for instance, is reframed as a politically astute queen navigating dynastic survival rather than a purely malicious instigator of exile (Banker, 2002). Her actions are contextualized within courtly intrigue, maternal anxiety, and political foresight, revealing how canonical memory simplifies complex motivations in order to preserve moral clarity. Banker's narrative thus exposes the selective compression at work in canonical remembrance.

Crucially, these revisionist strategies do not seek to dismantle the canon altogether. Instead, they coexist with it, producing what Assmann (2011) describes as a plural memory field in which stability and reinterpretation remain in productive tension. The canon continues to provide cultural coherence and symbolic continuity, while the archive enables critique, renewal, and ethical reconsideration. Through this movement from canon to archive, authority over epic interpretation is no longer monopolized by religious institutions or scholarly elites. Memory becomes participatory and dialogic, inviting readers to engage critically with inherited narratives rather than passively accept them.

### **Myth, History, and Narrative Construction**

A central concern in the analysis of post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction is the collapsing boundary between myth and history. This concern aligns closely with Hayden White's (1987) argument that historical narratives are shaped through emplotment—the narrative structuring of events into meaningful patterns. From this perspective, history is not a transparent record of the past but a constructed discourse shaped by ideological, ethical, and aesthetic choices. Mythological fiction foregrounds this constructedness by making visible the narrative logic underlying canonical memory. Ashok Banker's *Ramayana Series* explicitly emphasizes this narrative construction by foregrounding military logistics, political negotiation, and psychological motivation. Divine interventions are frequently reinterpreted as strategic decisions, misinterpretations, or technological advantages, reframing epic conflict as historically contingent rather than divinely ordained (Banker, 2002). The war between Rama and Ravana, for instance, is presented less as a cosmic struggle between good and evil and more as a clash of political systems, leadership styles, and ideological worldviews. This rationalization does not eliminate mythic resonance but repositions it within a framework intelligible to modern epistemologies.

Similarly, Amish Tripathi's rationalized cosmology collapses the distinction between myth and proto-history. In the *Shiva Trilogy*, gods are not supernatural beings but humans who attain divinity through advanced knowledge, moral discipline, and ethical leadership (Tripathi, 2010). Shiva's divinity emerges gradually through action and consequence rather than miraculous origin. This narrative strategy reframes myth as a mode of remembering ethical struggle rather than supernatural intervention. Myth becomes a symbolic language through which societies remember moral choice, leadership responsibility, and civilizational conflict.

From a Cultural Memory Studies perspective, these texts function as alternative historiographies. They do not compete with empirical history but offer interpretive frameworks that prioritize memory, ethical inquiry, and narrative meaning over factual certainty. As White (1987) suggests, meaning in historical discourse arises not from factual accumulation but from narrative coherence. Post-millennial mythological fiction embraces this insight, presenting myth as a reflective discourse that interrogates how the past is remembered rather than what precisely happened.

In collapsing the myth–history divide, contemporary epic retellings reaffirm myth's enduring relevance as cultural memory. They demonstrate that myth survives not because it resists change, but because it can be rewritten, reinterpreted, and reactivated in response to shifting cultural needs. Through the interplay of canon and archive, myth and history, these narratives transform epic memory into a living, dialogic archive—one that sustains continuity while embracing ethical complexity and interpretive plurality.

### **Humanising the Divine: Ethical Memory and Moral Relativism**

One of the most distinctive features of post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction is the systematic humanization of divine figures. Gods, heroes, and epic exemplars are no longer represented as infallible embodiments of dharma or metaphysical absolutes; instead, they appear as emotionally conflicted, ethically uncertain, and politically constrained agents operating within historically and socially conditioned worlds. This narrative transformation signals a profound shift in ethical memory—the culturally transmitted understanding of moral values—moving away from moral absolutism toward ethical relativism and situational judgment.

From the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies, this shift reflects what Jan Assmann (2011) identifies as the adaptive nature of cultural memory. Ethical norms preserved through memory are not static; they evolve in response to changing social realities, political systems, and psychological sensibilities. Post-millennial mythological fiction becomes a key site

where this ethical transformation is negotiated, allowing contemporary readers to engage with epic memory without submitting to unquestioned moral authority.

In Amish Tripathi's *Ram Chandra Series*, Rama is reimagined not as an omniscient deity but as a rule-bound administrator committed to institutional order, legal rationality, and social stability (Tripathi, 2015). Rama's unwavering adherence to law frequently generates ethical dilemmas, particularly when legal obligation conflicts with personal compassion. His decisions—whether in matters of exile, punishment, or political alliance—are framed not as divinely sanctioned absolutes but as fraught choices with tangible human consequences. This portrayal compels readers to interrogate whether *dharma* can remain ethical when detached from empathy and contextual sensitivity.

From a memory studies perspective, Tripathi's Rama represents a transformation in ethical remembrance. Traditional epic memory often presents Rama as *Maryada Purushottama*, the perfect moral exemplar whose actions require emulation rather than evaluation. Post-millennial retellings, however, convert this didactic memory into a dialogic ethical archive, where moral decisions invite debate rather than obedience. Memory here becomes a space for ethical inquiry, reflecting contemporary discomfort with rigid moral codes in pluralistic societies.

Anand Neelakantan's narratives extend this desacralization further by systematically stripping divine figures of metaphysical certainty. In *Ajaya* and *Asura*, gods function less as cosmic arbiters and more as political agents embedded within power structures. Divine favor appears contingent, partial, and often complicit in systemic inequality. Krishna, for instance, emerges as a strategist whose interventions serve political outcomes rather than universal justice. Such representations dismantle the aura of moral transcendence surrounding divine figures, revealing how epic memory has historically naturalized power through theological authority (Neelakantan, 2013).

This ethical ambiguity aligns with Aleida Assmann's (2011) assertion that cultural memory undergoes transformation as moral frameworks shift. In post-millennial mythological fiction, myth ceases to function as a prescriptive moral code and instead operates as a reflective ethical discourse. Divine figures no longer guarantee moral clarity; instead, they exemplify the difficulty of ethical action within constrained historical circumstances. Myth thus becomes dialogic rather than doctrinal, inviting reinterpretation rather than reverence.

Ashok Banker's retellings further reinforce this ethical humanization by emphasizing emotional vulnerability and psychological conflict. Epic heroes and gods are portrayed as strategic thinkers grappling with fear, ambition, and moral compromise. Rama's leadership, Ravana's ambition, and Kaikeyi's political maneuvering are framed within a realist ethical economy where decisions produce unintended consequences (Banker, 2002). By foregrounding ethical complexity, Banker's narratives underscore the idea that moral authority in epic memory is constructed rather than divinely guaranteed.

### **Power, Ideology, and the Politics of Memory**

Cultural Memory Studies allows concerns of power and ideology—traditionally emphasized in New Historicist and Marxist readings—to be reframed as memory politics: the struggle over which versions of the past are remembered, legitimized, or marginalized. From this perspective, post-millennial mythological fiction emerges as a sustained interrogation of how epic memory has historically naturalized authority, legitimized violence, and sanctified political dominance.

Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya* offers one of the most explicit critiques of epic memory politics. By narrating the *Mahabharata* from the Kaurava perspective, the text exposes royal authority as structurally unequal rather than morally ordained. Pandava legitimacy, traditionally grounded in divine sanction and narrative sympathy, is revealed as a retrospective construction that obscures systemic injustice and caste-based exclusion (Neelakantan, 2013). Duryodhana's resistance is reframed as political dissent rather than moral deviance, challenging the epic's moral economy. This narrative strategy constitutes a form of counter-memory, a concept closely aligned with Assmann's archive. Counter-memory disrupts dominant remembrance by foregrounding perspectives excluded from canonical narratives. In doing so, it reveals how epic history is shaped by ideological selection rather than neutral transmission. Neelakantan's work thus transforms myth into a site of political critique, exposing how memory legitimizes power.

Tripathi's depiction of governance similarly destabilizes the myth of the righteous king. His rulers are constrained by law, bureaucracy, demographic pressures, and ethical compromise. Kingship appears not as divine entitlement but as an administrative burden fraught with moral risk (Tripathi, 2015). This portrayal resonates with modern democratic anxieties about leadership, accountability, and institutional power, allowing epic memory to speak to contemporary political concerns. Banker's narratives further demystify warfare by presenting it as strategic violence rather than divine necessity. Battles are shaped by logistics, alliances, and psychological manipulation, foregrounding human agency over cosmic destiny (Banker, 2002). This reframing challenges the epic glorification of war and exposes how mythic memory has historically aestheticized violence to legitimize political conquest.

As Padma Malini Sundararaghvan (2008) argues, such revisionist strategies reveal the ideological underpinnings of mythic history, demonstrating that memory is always selective, interpretive, and power-laden. Post-millennial mythological fiction, therefore, functions as a critical memory practice that interrogates how authority is remembered and reproduced.

### **Gender, Silence, and Remembering the Margins**

Gendered memory occupies a central and revealing position in post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction, particularly in its sustained effort to recuperate voices marginalized within canonical epic traditions. Classical versions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have historically reduced female figures to symbolic functions—icons of chastity,

endurance, sacrifice, or temptation—while systematically excluding their interiority, dissent, political reasoning, and ethical agency. From the perspective of Cultural Memory Studies, such exclusions are not accidental but reflect selective remembrance, where patriarchal ideology determines what is preserved, valorized, and transmitted as authoritative cultural memory.

Jan Assmann's (2011) conception of cultural memory emphasizes that remembrance is always shaped by power relations. What a culture remembers is inseparable from who controls mnemonic transmission. In the Indian epic tradition, male-centered notions of kingship, warfare, and lineage have dominated canonical memory, while women's experiences have been either moralized or silenced. Female suffering is frequently aestheticized, transformed into moral exempla rather than ethical testimony. As a result, women appear less as historical or moral agents and more as narrative devices that facilitate male heroism or justify political conflict.

Post-millennial mythological fiction actively intervenes in this mnemonic imbalance through what Aleida Assmann (2010) terms memory repair—the process of addressing omissions, distortions, and exclusions embedded in dominant memory frameworks. Importantly, these contemporary retellings do not merely “add” women into pre-existing narratives; rather, they reconfigure the mnemonic structure of the epic itself, repositioning women as ethical subjects rather than symbolic objects. Gender, in this sense, becomes a critical site where cultural memory is renegotiated.

In Amish Tripathi's *Ram Chandra Series*, Sita is radically reimagined as a warrior, strategist, and political thinker whose authority rivals—and at times surpasses—that of male rulers (Tripathi, 2015). Unlike the canonical Sita, whose virtue is often defined through silence, endurance, and submission, Tripathi's Sita actively negotiates power, law, violence, and moral responsibility. Her martial competence challenges the patriarchal assumption that physical force and political authority are exclusively masculine domains, while her ethical autonomy disrupts the notion that *dharma* is inherently king-centered.

From a memory studies perspective, this transformation signals a shift from exemplary memory—where women function as moral symbols—to experiential memory, where women are remembered as agents shaped by ethical choice and historical contingency. Tripathi's Sita does not merely embody virtue; she deliberates, commands, and errs. Such representation reorients epic memory toward plural ethical subjectivities, aligning mythic remembrance with contemporary ideals of gender equality and agency.

Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* offers a similarly critical intervention by recuperating Draupadi's marginalized voice and political consciousness (Neelakantan, 2013). In canonical memory, Draupadi is frequently remembered either as the catalyst for the Kurukshetra war or as a symbol of violated honor, her humiliation serving to justify male vengeance. Neelakantan resists this reduction by foregrounding her emotional complexity, political awareness, and constrained agency within patriarchal power structures.

Rather than positioning Draupadi as a passive victim or narrative trigger, *Ajaya* presents her as a conscious participant in political processes that deny her autonomy while exploiting her symbolic value. This reinterpretation exposes how canonical epic memory silences women by transforming them into moral or emotional instruments rather than historical actors. By restoring Draupadi's interiority, Neelakantan pluralizes epic memory, revealing its ideological construction and opening space for suppressed ethical perspectives.

Ashok Banker's *Ramayana Series* further contributes to this mnemonic reconfiguration by granting psychological depth and narrative motivation to female figures traditionally remembered through moral shorthand. Kaikeyi, long vilified as the archetypal wicked stepmother, is reimagined as a politically astute queen navigating dynastic survival, maternal anxiety, and royal obligation (Banker, 2002). Her demand for Rama's exile is reframed not as irrational jealousy but as a strategic intervention shaped by court politics and competing loyalties.

This reframing exemplifies counter-memory, challenging dominant moral binaries embedded in epic tradition. Banker's Kaikeyi forces readers to confront how canonical memory simplifies complex motivations in order to preserve moral clarity. Similarly, Mandodari is portrayed not merely as Ravana's virtuous wife but as a reflective moral presence, capable of critique and ethical reasoning. While these revisions remain constrained by epic structure and patriarchal norms, they nonetheless expand cultural memory by complicating inherited judgments and moral hierarchies.

Collectively, these texts demonstrate that gendered reinterpretation in post-millennial mythological fiction is not merely a feminist corrective but a broader mnemonic intervention. By re-centering female agency, these narratives reveal how epic memory has been shaped by ideological selection and patriarchal authority. Gender becomes a lens through which the politics of remembering itself is exposed.

### **Popular Fiction and the Democratization of Memory**

A persistent critical bias against post-millennial mythological fiction stems from its classification as popular or commercial literature. Such bias often assumes that popularity undermines literary and cultural seriousness. Cultural Memory Studies fundamentally challenges this assumption by emphasizing that memory survives not through elite preservation but through repetition, accessibility, and transmission (Assmann, 2011). Memory that does not circulate widely risks extinction, regardless of its canonical status.

The extraordinary readership of Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* exemplifies this process of memory democratization. By presenting Shiva as a tribal leader whose divinity emerges through ethical action, social reform, and moral struggle rather than preordained destiny, Tripathi translates mythic memory into a contemporary idiom of leadership and responsibility (Tripathi, 2010). The trilogy's mass appeal ensures that epic memory reaches audiences far beyond ritualistic, academic, or religious domains, embedding myth within everyday cultural consciousness.

Similarly, Ashok Banker's serialized retellings adopt the narrative rhythms of global fantasy fiction—fast-paced action, episodic structure, and psychological realism—making epic memory accessible to readers accustomed to popular genres. Banker's strategy aligns with Aleida Assmann's (2011) assertion that adaptation enhances mnemonic endurance by ensuring cultural relevance. Rather than diluting myth, popular form becomes a vehicle for its survival.

Emma Dawson Varughese's (2013) concept of Bharati Fantasy is particularly illuminating in this context. Neelakantan's *Ajaya* series blends epic material with realist political critique, allowing marginalized perspectives—such as those of the Kauravas—to enter popular memory. Through mass readership, these alternative memories acquire cultural legitimacy, challenging the exclusivity of canonical remembrance.

Thus, popular mythological fiction emerges not as cultural dilution but as a mass mnemonic practice, reshaping collective imagination on a scale unmatched by ritual repetition or academic discourse. By circulating alternative ethical, gendered, and political memories, these texts ensure that myth remains a living, contested, and inclusive cultural archive.

### English Language and Memory Translation

The choice of English as the medium for post-millennial Indian epic retellings introduces a complex and often contested process of memory translation. Critics frequently frame this linguistic shift as a form of cultural dilution, arguing that rendering Sanskrit or vernacular epics in English risks severing myth from its ritual, philosophical, and linguistic roots. However, when examined through the lens of Cultural Memory Studies, English emerges not as a vehicle of erasure but as a strategic mnemonic tool—one that enables indigenous narratives to be reasserted within the conditions of global modernity.

Jan Assmann's (2011) notion of transcultural memory circulation is particularly relevant here. Cultural memory, Assmann argues, survives not by remaining bound to a single language or community but by traveling across cultural and linguistic boundaries while retaining its symbolic core. Translation, in this sense, is not merely linguistic substitution but mnemonic transformation—an adaptive process that ensures memory's continued relevance. English-language mythological fiction exemplifies this process by allowing Indian epic memory to circulate within global literary systems without abandoning its civilizational framework.

In Amish Tripathi's mythological works, this strategy is evident in the careful retention and contextualization of Sanskrit concepts such as *dharma*, *karma*, *maryada*, and *adharma*. Rather than replacing these terms with approximate English equivalents, Tripathi embeds them within explanatory narrative contexts that gradually acclimatize readers unfamiliar with ritual or philosophical traditions (Tripathi, 2010). This approach preserves the semantic density of cultural memory while making it accessible to non-specialist audiences. The epic's mnemonic core—ethical struggle, moral responsibility, and social order—remains intact even as its linguistic form changes.

From a memory studies perspective, this narrative strategy illustrates how translation functions as mnemonic mediation rather than simplification. Epic memory is not reduced to universal moral platitudes; instead, it is carefully recontextualized so that cultural specificity coexists with readability. In doing so, Tripathi transforms English from a colonial inheritance into a postcolonial instrument of cultural assertion. English becomes a language through which Indian myth speaks globally, not one through which it is overwritten.

Anand Neelakantan's use of English further demonstrates how linguistic choice reshapes cultural memory. His prose, marked by political realism, ethical ambiguity, and sociological critique, uses English to interrogate structures of caste, power, exclusion, and historical injustice embedded within epic narratives (Neelakantan, 2013). Writing in English allows Neelakantan to position Indian mythological memory within contemporary global discourses on justice, inequality, and subalternity. The Mahabharata, in *Ajaya*, becomes not merely a sacred narrative but a site of ethical contestation that resonates with modern debates on marginalization and resistance.

In this sense, English facilitates what may be termed critical memory translation. Rather than reaffirming devotional reverence, Neelakantan's English-language retellings enable myth to function as a medium of ethical inquiry. Memory is no longer received as sacred inheritance but interrogated as a historically contingent construction shaped by ideological power. The linguistic shift thus enhances, rather than diminishes, the epic's capacity to engage contemporary readers critically.

Ashok Banker's use of English introduces yet another dimension of memory translation by situating Indian epic memory alongside global mythic and fantasy traditions. Banker adopts narrative conventions familiar to readers of Western fantasy—heroic quests, serialized storytelling, cinematic pacing, and psychological characterization—while embedding them within the narrative framework of the *Ramayana* (Banker, 2002). This strategy does not erase cultural specificity; rather, it places Indian epic memory in dialogue with global mythic systems such as Greco-Roman epics, Norse sagas, and modern fantasy literature.

From a cultural memory perspective, Banker's approach exemplifies comparative mnemonic integration. By aligning Indian myths with global narrative forms, Banker enables cross-cultural resonance and comparative reading, embedding Indian epics within transnational literary memory. The *Ramayana* thus becomes legible not only as a regional or national epic but as part of a shared global archive of mythic storytelling. English functions here as a bridge language, expanding the epic's mnemonic reach without dissolving its cultural core.

### Myth as Living Archive

Taken together, the works of Tripathi, Neelakantan, and Banker exemplify myth as a living archive—a dynamic system of remembrance that balances continuity and transformation. Unlike static archives that preserve texts as immutable

artifacts, living archives invite reinterpretation, debate, and renewal. Cultural Memory Studies emphasizes that memory remains operative only when it can adapt to changing historical conditions, ethical frameworks, and social expectations (Assmann, 2011). Post-millennial mythological fiction embodies this principle by continually revisiting canonical narratives while activating archival memories suppressed or marginalized by tradition.

Tripathi's ethical reinterpretation of gods transforms divine memory into a discourse of leadership, moral responsibility, and social reform. Neelakantan's recovery of antagonists' perspectives exposes the ideological selectivity of canonical remembrance and foregrounds counter-memory as a vital component of cultural survival. Banker's psychological reworking of epic characters humanizes mythic figures, allowing readers to engage with epic memory through empathy rather than reverence.

Collectively, these narrative strategies demonstrate that myth survives not through preservation alone but through adaptive reinterpretation. Each retelling rebalances the relationship between canon and archive, stabilizing cultural memory while preventing its fossilization. The epic endures precisely because it can absorb new meanings without losing symbolic coherence. From a Memory Studies perspective, rewriting is not distortion but cultural survival. Mythological fiction does not weaken epic tradition; it sustains it by enabling remembrance to remain dialogic, participatory, and ethically responsive. The epic is remembered not because it is unchanged, but because it is continually re-remembered.

In this sense, post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction affirms myth's enduring relevance in a globalized world. By translating memory across languages, cultures, and narrative forms, these texts ensure that epic memory remains a living archive—capable of preservation, critique, and renewal in the face of historical change.

### **Argumentative Synthesis with Textual Evidence: Preservation, Transformation, and Transmission**

This analysis demonstrates that post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction performs three interconnected and mutually reinforcing memory functions—preservation, transformation, and transmission—which together position these narratives as active agents of cultural remembrance rather than passive literary adaptations. Drawing on Cultural Memory Studies, particularly the work of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann, this section argues that the novels of Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, and Anand Neelakantan function as primary mnemonic agents, shaping how contemporary India remembers, reinterprets, and re-circulates its mythic past. These texts do not merely retell epics; they participate in the ongoing cultural labor of remembering.

#### **Preservation: Sustaining Epic Narratives as Cultural Memory**

The first mnemonic function performed by post-millennial mythological fiction is preservation—the sustaining of epic narratives as long-term cultural memory. In Cultural Memory Theory, preservation does not imply static repetition but the maintenance of symbolic continuity across time. Ashok Banker's expansive retellings of the *Ramayana* exemplify this preservative function. Through multi-volume narrative reconstruction, Banker ensures that epic memory remains present within contemporary literary culture, resisting both cultural amnesia and the confinement of myth to ritual or devotional spaces.

Banker's project is preservative in scope and ambition. By reconstructing the epic world in meticulous detail—its geographies, lineages, conflicts, and political structures—he stabilizes epic memory for a readership increasingly distant from oral recitation or scriptural study. This form of preservation aligns with Jan Assmann's (2011) understanding of cultural memory as dependent on durable narrative forms capable of surviving generational transition. Banker's novels function as mnemonic containers, ensuring that the epic remains culturally available even as modes of transmission shift from temple and performance to print and popular fiction.

Crucially, preservation here does not mean reverential duplication. Banker preserves the epic by re-narrating it in a form that contemporary readers can inhabit imaginatively. His detailed world-building enables emotional and cognitive engagement, which is essential for memory endurance. Cultural memory, as Assmann reminds us, survives not merely because it is sacred, but because it is rememberable.

#### **Transformation: Reconfiguring Ethical, Political, and Gendered Meaning**

Preservation alone, however, is insufficient to explain the cultural force of post-millennial mythological fiction. The second mnemonic function—transformation—is what enables epic memory to remain ethically and politically relevant. Transformation involves the reconfiguration of inherited meanings in response to changing moral frameworks, social structures, and ideological concerns.

Amish Tripathi's mythological works exemplify this transformative function through the ethical humanization of divinity. In both the *Shiva Trilogy* and the *Ram Chandra Series*, gods are no longer metaphysical absolutes but historically situated moral agents. Shiva becomes divine through ethical action and social reform; Rama becomes an administrator bound by law, often at the cost of compassion. These portrayals transform epic memory from devotional idealization into ethical inquiry. From a memory studies perspective, this marks a shift in ethical memory—the way moral values are remembered and transmitted. Traditional epics often functioned as repositories of moral exempla, presenting relatively stable models of dharma. Tripathi's retellings destabilize these models, foregrounding moral ambiguity, situational ethics, and institutional constraint. Memory here becomes dialogic rather than didactic, inviting readers to reflect on the costs of righteousness rather than accept it as absolute.

Anand Neelakantan's work performs a different but equally significant transformation by activating counter-memory. Through revisionist narratives such as *Ajaya* and *Asura*, Neelakantan recuperates perspectives systematically marginalized

by canonical epic memory. Figures such as Duryodhana and Ravana are reimagined not as embodiments of adharma but as politically and socially constrained individuals shaped by exclusion, caste hierarchy, and historical injustice. This transformation exposes the memory politics underlying epic tradition. Canonical memory, Neelakantan suggests, is not morally neutral but ideologically constructed—privileging victors, kings, and dominant social groups while silencing dissenting voices. By foregrounding alternative perspectives, Neelakantan does not destroy epic memory but pluralizes it, aligning with Aleida Assmann's (2010) assertion that cultural memory thrives through the tension between canon and archive. Transformation, in this sense, ensures that memory remains ethically responsive rather than fossilized. Gendered transformation further deepens this mnemonic reconfiguration. Across the works of Tripathi, Neelakantan, and Banker, female figures such as Sita, Draupadi, Kaikeyi, and Mandodari are granted agency, interiority, and ethical voice. These reinterpretations repair silences embedded in patriarchal epic memory, contributing to a more inclusive cultural remembrance. Transformation thus operates across ethical, political, and gendered dimensions, reshaping how the past is remembered in the present.

### **Transmission: Popular Fiction and Mnemonic Accessibility**

The third mnemonic function performed by post-millennial mythological fiction is transmission—the dissemination of epic memory through accessible, popular English-language forms. Cultural memory, as Assmann (2011) emphasizes, depends not only on preservation and reinterpretation but on circulation. Memory that does not travel risks extinction. The choice of English and the adoption of popular narrative forms—fantasy conventions, serialized storytelling, psychological realism—enable epic memory to reach audiences far beyond ritual specialists, scholars, or religious institutions. Tripathi's mass readership, Banker's genre hybridity, and Neelakantan's political realism ensure that epic memory circulates within everyday reading practices, shaping collective imagination at a scale unmatched by traditional mnemonic institutions. Transmission through popular fiction also democratizes memory. Authority over epic interpretation is no longer monopolized by priests, scholars, or canonical texts. Readers become participants in mnemonic negotiation, engaging critically with inherited narratives. Popularity, far from trivializing myth, enhances its mnemonic power by embedding it within lived cultural experience. English-language transmission further enables transcultural memory circulation, allowing Indian epic narratives to enter global literary networks while retaining cultural specificity. Mythological fiction thus participates in both national and transnational memory systems, positioning Indian epics within a global archive of mythic storytelling.

Taken together, preservation, transformation, and transmission reveal post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction as a form of mnemonic labor—the active cultural work of remembering, reinterpreting, and circulating the past. The novels of Tripathi, Neelakantan, and Banker function not as secondary adaptations but as primary mnemonic agents, shaping how contemporary India relates to its mythic inheritance. These texts do not simply inherit epic memory; they renegotiate it. By preserving narrative continuity, transforming inherited meanings, and transmitting memory through popular forms, post-millennial mythological fiction ensures that myth remains a living archive rather than a static relic. Remembering, here, is not passive recall but active cultural production.

In this sense, mythological fiction does not merely retell epics—it remembers them into the present, sustaining cultural identity through ongoing reinterpretation. The endurance of Indian epics in contemporary literary culture thus testifies not to the immutability of tradition, but to its remarkable capacity for adaptive remembrance.

### **Findings**

The present study establishes that post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction functions fundamentally as a cultural memory practice, rather than merely as historical fiction, fantasy, or popular literature. Drawing on Cultural Memory Theory, the analysis demonstrates that contemporary epic retellings operate as mnemonic sites where the past is not passively inherited but actively remembered, reinterpreted, and transmitted in response to present ethical, ideological, and socio-political conditions.

A key finding of the study is that post-millennial mythological fiction consistently mediates between canonical memory and archival reinterpretation. While these narratives remain anchored in authoritative epic traditions, they simultaneously activate suppressed or marginalized perspectives by re-centering vilified, minor, or ethically ambiguous figures. Revisionist works by Anand Neelakantan, for instance, recuperate characters such as Duryodhana and Ravana, exposing the politics of remembrance that underpin canonical moral hierarchies. This movement from canon to archive pluralizes cultural memory, ensuring that epic narratives remain open to reinterpretation rather than fossilized as sacred, unquestionable texts. In doing so, these narratives reaffirm Aleida Assmann's distinction between stabilized cultural memory and adaptive remembrance.

The study further finds that post-millennial mythological fiction systematically collapses rigid distinctions between myth and history, foregrounding narrative construction and ethical interpretation over historical factuality. By rationalizing supernatural elements and emphasizing political, psychological, and ethical motivations—as evident in the works of Ashok Banker and Amish Tripathi—these texts reframe myth as an alternative historiographic discourse. This reconfiguration aligns with Hayden White's argument that both myth and history are structured through narrative emplotment, reinforcing the idea that memory is constructed, selective, and ideologically inflected rather than neutral.

Another significant finding concerns the humanization of divine figures, which marks a transformation in ethical memory. Post-millennial retellings portray gods and epic heroes as fallible, conflicted, and morally constrained beings. Tripathi's portrayal of Rama as a rule-bound administrator rather than an infallible deity exemplifies a shift from moral absolutism

to ethical relativism. This transformation enables contemporary readers to engage with epic memory dialogically rather than devotionally, allowing myths to function as spaces of ethical reflection rather than prescriptive moral codes. The analysis also reveals that post-millennial mythological fiction performs a crucial function of memory democratization. By relocating epic narratives from ritualistic, religious, and scholarly domains into popular English-language fiction, these texts make cultural memory accessible to a wide and diverse readership. Contrary to critical assumptions that popularity undermines literary value, the study demonstrates that mass circulation enhances the mnemonic power of mythological fiction, enabling it to shape collective consciousness more effectively than exclusive canonical or academic forms. Additionally, the use of English as the medium of epic retellings emerges as a strategy of transcultural memory transmission. Writing Indian myths in English does not erode cultural specificity; instead, it facilitates the global circulation of Indian cultural memory while retaining its symbolic and ethical core. This linguistic shift positions post-millennial mythological fiction as both locally rooted and globally resonant. Finally, the findings confirm that gendered and marginal perspectives in contemporary epic rewritings contribute to memory repair, addressing silences and exclusions embedded in canonical narratives. By re-centering figures such as Sita and Draupadi, these narratives expand the scope of cultural memory through plurality, contestation, and inclusivity, even while remaining constrained by the overarching epic framework. Taken together, the study concludes that post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction functions as a living archive of cultural memory. Through preservation, transformation, and transmission, these narratives sustain India's epic traditions while continually reshaping their meanings for contemporary society.

### Conclusion

This study has examined post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction through the lens of Cultural Memory Studies, arguing that contemporary rewritings of Indian epics function not merely as literary adaptations but as dynamic practices of cultural remembrance. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann, and grounded in the critical framework articulated, the paper has demonstrated that mythological fiction in the post-millennial period operates as a living archive—one that preserves, reinterprets, and transmits collective memory in response to shifting socio-cultural, ethical, and ideological contexts.

The analysis has shown that contemporary epic retellings actively negotiate the relationship between canon and archive, destabilizing singular, authoritative versions of myth while recuperating suppressed or marginalized perspectives. By revisiting epic narratives from alternative viewpoints, writers such as Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, and Ashok Banker transform myth into a plural and dialogic memory space. This process does not undermine tradition; rather, it sustains epic memory through adaptive renewal, ensuring its relevance in the face of modern ethical dilemmas, political anxieties, and cultural transformations.

A central conclusion of the study is that post-millennial mythological fiction collapses rigid distinctions between myth and history, foregrounding narrative construction over historical objectivity. By rationalizing the supernatural, humanizing divine figures, and emphasizing ethical ambiguity, these narratives reframe myth as a reflective cultural discourse rather than a prescriptive moral system. In doing so, they invite readers to engage critically with inherited cultural memory, transforming epic narratives into spaces of ethical inquiry, historical reflection, and ideological negotiation.

The study also underscores the importance of popular fiction as a powerful medium of memory transmission. Contrary to critical hierarchies that equate popularity with cultural triviality, this research affirms that mass readership enhances the mnemonic function of mythological fiction. By relocating epic narratives from ritualistic and scholarly spheres into accessible English-language prose, post-millennial writers democratize cultural memory and expand its reach across generational, social, and geographical boundaries.

Furthermore, the use of English as the medium for epic retellings emerges as a strategic act of transcultural memory translation. Rather than eroding cultural specificity, English-language mythological fiction enables Indian cultural memory to circulate globally while retaining its ethical and symbolic depth. This linguistic choice reflects a confident postcolonial engagement with global modernity, wherein indigenous narratives are reasserted rather than eclipsed.

In conclusion, the study affirms that post-millennial Indian English mythological fiction constitutes a significant literary and cultural phenomenon that merits sustained academic attention. By foregrounding memory as a central analytical category, this research contributes to Indian literary studies while extending the scope of Memory Studies beyond its predominantly Western focus. Future research may build upon this framework by examining regional-language retellings, visual and digital adaptations, or comparative mythological traditions, further illuminating the enduring role of myth as cultural memory in an increasingly interconnected world.

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