

**Original Article**

# Gods, Heroes, and Legends Reimagined: From Ancient Myths to Modern Movies, Folklore to Film

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper is an assessment of the perspective of Mythology and Folklore in mainstream media popularized through the use of Novels, novel adaptations, Movies, Cartoons, Comics, and Games. We see how the Hero's journey inspires cross-cultural consciousness and a universal journey that resonates in every culture, however diverse they are. Media often is seen as more than a literary tool, as it allows the Myths and folklore from other countries and cultures to be shared all over the world, as it incorporates new cultural ideals, values, and morals that allow the audiences to learn about other cultures. Because Modern Media incorporates aspects of myths and legends from several different cultures, it brings a widened perspective of people around the world. Mainstream media helps in the regard of spreading the knowledge of different religions and cultures to audiences of all age groups with the help of Novels (fiction), movies, and Games.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Mythology, Folklore, Mainstream Media, Cross-Culture Consciousness.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Folklore and Mythologies, in a broader sense, are stories from our ancestors passed down from generation to generation. Both are forms of cultural storytelling, but with different focuses and objectives. Folklore is a type of story that is generally passed down through word of mouth, very rarely having written text. Folklores have a broader spectrum that incorporates music, dance, drama, tradition, superstition, and traditional beliefs. Mythologies, on the other hand, are specific stories that focus on stories of Gods and Goddesses, Celestial Beings, and stories on the origin of the world or life. These are more related to Faith, Belief of the Masses, and most importantly, Religion. Mythologies have written scripts that are regarded as Holy Scripture and regarded as 'the word of God' or 'Laws of life' given to Humans by the Gods themselves [1]. Mainstream media such as Cinema and Novels (especially children's novels) have started using Mythologies as a way to attract the young hearts and minds towards Myth and folklore by depicting them in a fantastical and magical way that stimulates the peoples' imagination and giving them a new and fresh perspective to Ancient Mythology, Religion and Folklore which have been seen as dry and boring by the teens and children. The patterns of ancient myths are repeated in modern media and literature, with minor changes to make them fresh and interesting in the modern context because of an increased depth of imagination and ability [3].

## 2. TYPES OF MYTHS AND FOLKLORE USED IN MEDIA

There are many ways to analyze mythologies. But the recurring subcategories of contemporary Mythological / folklore movies are generally: Religious, Philosophical, or fantastical. These genres serve as the basis for more contemporary classifications; each can be divided and examined in light of the different kinds of myths that are examined through their shared themes and ethics. Though their subjects and settings are typically limited to science fiction, fantasy, and religion, myths can be found in a wide range of contemporary genres. Genres cover all kinds of myths, discuss the morals, themes, and life lessons that are conveyed in each tale, and have the power to marginalize some story types in terms of their cultural relevance today. At their most fundamental, myths are classic tales that frequently tell of creation, bravery, or lessons to be learned.

### 2.1. ROLE OF THE HERO

An intriguing viewpoint on any story with a hero can be gained by analyzing the rhetorical function of the hero's journey. The hero's journey is transforming and significant because it has an effect that extends beyond the hero in that it is primarily a persuasive story. The protagonist of the story is the hero, who is feared for their newly altered perspectives but admired for their transformed sense of self. As a result, the hero serves as a prime example of a member of their culture and has an intriguing role in the story. Although their experience is respected, it is also avoided. Their personal development serves as a guide for the reader, and the journey itself is the main focus of the story. The main focus of a story is the hero's journey through hardships, setbacks, loss, and triumph. When the classic elements of a mythic story are met, each hero has a comparable journey, albeit with differences

in the villain themes, emotional depth, and the means by which the hero accomplishes their objectives. They also serve as role models for readers.

The hero's journey in myth telling and retelling is their quest for a fictional deity that naturally lends itself to a compelling story. In essence, the hero is a valued member of society because, through a series of life-altering endeavors, they have elevated themselves above society. Every myth or story's protagonist undergoes an irreversible metamorphosis as a result of their experiences, rising from the banalities of everyday life to become a reborn and renewed figure of perfection or eternal glory. However, the chosen person must first finish the journey that will transform their entire life in order to be deemed a hero. The hero would not be human-like and relatable to the culture in which their story is being told if the journey were not taken.

### 3. MEDIA IN TWO DIFFERENT CINE-FIELDS

#### 3.1. INDIAN MYTHOLOGICAL FILMS

Mainstream Media has shown us many genres and themes. Some have become a hit; others have not tickled the people's fancies. Mythologies and folklore have been a recurring theme in Indian cinemas; some of the works are still being talked about and studied decades later. Films like *Bakta Prahlada* (1967), *Karnan* (1964), *Raja Harischandra* (1913), and *Mahabharata* (series, 1988) are iconic works that have become pillars in Indian Film History **Error! Reference source not found.** Religion and Mythology have been one of the main genres and themes used in Indian cinema, as it was the target demographic of the past generation. These films have done their best to be true to the script (so to speak) and conveyed a sense of emotions that have touched the hearts of people who have carried these films, and the following generations have followed them, until the late 80s.

Special Effects of the early films leave much to be desired, but it was enough for people, as the audience had focused more on the story and the accuracy of the adapted Mythology or folklore. Contemporary Indian films have carried on the tradition of these types of films by bringing in a modern twist to them. Animation and CGI have worked wonders and transformed the dull and boring religious films into works of art with highly convincing movie magic that almost looks real on the screen. Films like *Brahmastra* (2022), *Tumbaad* (2018), and *Adhipurush* (2023) have successfully blended Ancient Mythology with modern technology- referencing the animation and CGI works done in these films **Error! Reference source not found.** They have also brought in famous A-list actors to both make it a hit with the box office and also attract the fans. There has been a great improvement in the Indian Cine-field where the qualities of the motion pictures, the direction and production of the films, and the actors themselves have grown over the past couple of decades. This, in turn, has raised the expectations of the audiences, whose appetite for entertainment is never satiated; only diminished.

#### 3.2. WESTERN MYTHOLOGICAL FILMS

Hollywood has always been a Titan in the field of cinema, pumping out film after film that has captivated viewers. But films on Mythology and folklore have been lackluster for the most part. Movies based on the Christian faith, like *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977), and *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), have been the staple of Mythology in Western movies. And then came the Mythical stories of yore: *Excalibur* (1981), *Hercules* (animated, 1997), and the world-famous *Aladdin* (1992) have started a trend that broke away from the monotony of religious films and started venturing into other Mythologies and folklore, such as the Arthurian Legends, the Herculean Legends, and the Arabian Folktales and Lore. This had started the rise of a flourishing field of storytelling with the help of Computerized Graphics, SFX, and Animation that changed the landscape of Hollywood.

During the years of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the viewership increased as cinema became more affordable and accessible to the general population, which increased the number of viewers. Mythology and folklore had come under the umbrella term of Fantasy, bringing in not only adult audiences but also children. *Bruce Almighty* (2003), a popular American film, with the lead role played by Jim Carrey, an A-list actor, brought a different spin to the existing idea of God and Godhood. *Shrek* (2004), another popular American film, is an animated movie that blends many different children's stories and folklores in the movie. Many other such examples have emerged after that and have made fantasy and mythology mainstream in the Cine-field. After the millennium had turned the corner, Films like *Troy* (2004) had started shifting the focus of Fantasy to Greek and Roman Mythology **Error! Reference source not found.** The Film has a brilliant depiction of Homer's epic, which was further enhanced by the actors' breathtaking performance. Many other such examples have emerged after that and have made fantasy and mythology mainstream in the Cine-field.

Marvel and DC, two of the biggest comic book franchises, have always had a massive fan base among middle-school, high school, and college-going kids. It had almost always had a target audience of kids aged 13 to 21 and had enjoyed a favorable response from them. But after the introduction of the MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) and the DCEU (Detective Comics Extended Universe), the fan base had exploded, including age groups from all spectrums. From Toddlers dressing up as Thor or Wonder

Woman for Halloween to elderly retirees who want some action in their life, they all want a piece of the larger than life Mythical Characters and the extraordinary, magical, and awesome feats they perform on screen. MCU had introduced Thor, Loki, and Odin from the Norse Mythologies in *Thor* (2011), which became popular worldwide. The MCU had also brought in the African and Egyptian Mythologies with the Mega Blockbuster hit *The Black Panther* (2018), followed by *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022).

The DCUE had introduced Diana of Themyscira (popularly known as Wonder Woman) in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), where she played a supporting role; not much was revealed about her origins. But in the following year, DCEU released *Wonder Woman* (2017), where her childhood, her past, and her origins were revealed. With Wonder Woman's introduction, DCEU had formed a link to the ancient Greek Mythologies, as in the movies, it is revealed that Diana is the daughter of Zeus, the Father/King of the Greek Pantheon **Error! Reference source not found.** This has rekindled the trend of strong heroines taking the lead in hero stories from a position of both strength and intelligence. The use of women as supporting heroines has its roots in classical mythology. Even as goddesses, women are subservient to men and are typically not the subject of their own narratives. However, these strong heroines are a positive symbol of change and a reflection of the increasing gender equality in cultures. Women are increasingly permitted to act as heroes at higher societal levels in modern cultures, but this was a far less common occurrence in ancient and classical cultures.

Not only Myths but Folklores are also folklore are used in Movies. *John Wick* (2014), a movie about an assassin/hit man, who comes out of retirement due to a very personal vendetta, is not exactly based on folklore, but the protagonist, John Wick, is given a nickname which everyone fears and respects: Babayaga. The Babayaga is regarded as the Russian equivalent to the Boogeyman - a mythical creature typically used to frighten children into good behavior. The age-old folklore of the immortal, bloodsucking creatures of the dark has become a popular trope in Hollywood movies. The concept of vampires, as we know them, primarily originated in Eastern European folklore, particularly in the Balkans. The word "vampire" itself is believed to have roots in Slavic languages, possibly related to words like "upir" or "strigoy," which described creatures that were believed to return from the dead and feed on the living. Films like the classic *Nosferatu* (1922), *Blade* (1998), and *Morbius* (2022) from Marvel Comics have all followed this genre. Arguably, *Twilight* (2008) had become one of the most famous films to follow this genre, while still having small differences in the Myth.

Films are not the only place these folklores and Mythologies are used; they are used in episodic series like *The Sandman* (started 2022) - originally from DC Comics, which is a Scandinavian folklore. He is said to sprinkle sand or dust on or into the eyes of children at night to bring on sleep and dreams. The grit or "sleep" (rheum) in one's eyes upon waking is the supposed result of the Sandman's work the previous night. Another example is the Starz Network Series - *American Gods* (series start, 2017), based on Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel by the same name, is a modern iteration of Gods and Goddesses living among the mortals, hiding their power and blending into society. The story creates a contemporary mythological story set in the United States by fusing mythologies and folklore from many cultures. These comprise Irish and other European folklore, as well as mythologies from Norse, Egyptian, African, Indian, and Slavic cultures. In a world increasingly dominated by new gods of media, technology, and consumerism, the story examines how these ancient deities now forgotten or diminished are fighting for survival **Error! Reference source not found.**

#### 4. ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Modern literature has brought diverse and different kinds of books and literary works by new Authors, who have challenged traditional Mythologies and folklore and have brought a twist to the stories. This has brought new flavors and creative ideas, broadening the scope of entertainment. In the Indian Subcontinent, an author has taken the country by storm- Amish Tripathi, with his book series, *The Shiva Trilogy* (2010), which includes three books, followed by the *Ram Chandra Series*. The stories follow the lives of Shiva and Ram respectively- major gods of the Hindu Mythology, but at the same time, making them appear human and mortal. Mr.Tripathi has blended Science and faith to create a masterpiece that has become a beloved tale in the country **Error! Reference source not found.**

Ashwin Sanghi, also an Indian writer has also written Mythological fiction that has a different approach to the storytelling than Amish Tripathi. Yet we can see that his novel carry similar inflections of blending science and Mythology into reality that grips the readers' attention. His works like *Krishna's Key* (2012), *Rozabal Line* (2017), *Keepers of the Kalachakra* (2018), *The Magicians of Mazda* (2022), and the *Vault of Vishnu* (2020) are some of his best and have sold thousands of copies all over the world **Error! Reference source not found.** The stories connect the ancient times to the modern times via ancestral bloodlines and descendants that carry their memories through that link. His works give a colorful picture of various cultures and religions all over the world and adds a twist it, giving a shine of realism to them.

Angels and Demons (2000) and The Da Vinci Code (2003), two of Dan Brown's best-selling novels, have had such a profound influence on the literary world that they were both successful movie adaptations when they came out in 2009 and 2006, respectively. The Da Vinci Code made \$758 million worldwide at the box office, making it the second-highest-grossing film of 2006. It also became only the second film of the year to make \$200 million in the US and Canada. Angels & Demons made \$485.9 million worldwide, making it the ninth highest-grossing film of 2009. The Da Vinci Code earned more money globally, even though both films were well-liked. As per certain reviews, Angels & Demons offered a more captivating and exhilarating experience than its predecessor.

Another author who has delved deeply into mythology is Rick Riordan. *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* is a book series centered on a teenage boy, Percy Jackson, who is the son of the Greek God Poseidon, and his adventures (but misadventures, according to Percy, hinting at his awful luck). He lives in a Camp full of demigods like himself, kept away from the mundane world by magical means. He embarks on multiple adventures where he is sent on certain quests that are essentially handed out to him and his friends by an Oracle. Roman Mythology, considered an offshoot of Greek, is also prevalent in the extended series known as the *Heroes of Olympus Series*. Rick Riordan has not only used Greek Mythology but has also used Egyptian Mythology; *The Kane Chronicles* is a series of two siblings who are the living vessels of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses, and their struggle to save the world from evil and disaster. *The Magnus Chase Series* is also the work of Riordan. In this series, he has introduced the Norse Mythologies and folklore, bringing in popular Mythical characters like Odin and Thor to the story. However, what is very unique is the fact that Riordan has interconnected all Four Series of books from four different Mythologies to bring the readers an entire universe that is rich in history and culture, and not to forget magic and magical creatures that fascinate the audience.

## 5. MODERN ITERATIONS USED IN GAMES

Video Games, once an obscure part of the entertainment industry, are generally regarded as casual entertainment and have now transformed into a major form of entertainment and a source of income for some. There are many popular games out there with Mythological, magical themes, but none have risen to such a height as the world-famous PlayStation Game: God of War series. The game depicts an alternate universe of Gods and Titans battling it out for glory and victory over each other. Kratos, born as a Spartan Soldier, finds himself to be the pawn of a cruel god. In his service to the original God of War of the Greek pantheon – Ares, he is tricked into killing his own wife and child. He embarks on a brutal and visceral journey scaling Mt.Olympus itself to slay the Gods. Across six parts of the game, he makes it his sole purpose to avenge his family. In the last one, Kratos, after accomplishing his goal and satiating his hunger for vengeance, is ready to die and falls from Mount Olympus. However, in a twist of fate, he somehow ends up in another reality as his world comes crumbling down due to his action of killing the gods that govern the rules of nature. He finds himself in the realm of Midgard, part of the Norse mythology. There, he vows to live peacefully and even start a family. But somehow, trouble finds him and picks up his weapon again.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Myths and folklore are just means by which we understand the different and varied cultures and traditions of other countries, religions, and ethnicity through forms of fantastical stories and gripping narration. These myths tell us of the best and worst qualities of man by referencing the legendary Heroes of old. They are described to be someone people should aspire to be, but at the same time, these Mythologies and Folklore tell us of cautionary tales and mistakes not to be repeated. Much folklore has a life message or a Moral to it urges us to learn from them. Myths are how cultures and diverse people relate to each other and it becomes easier and more fun through the use of Novels, Movies and Games. As we have seen the popularity of modern myths arises from the cultural crossover. These new myths serve as cultural bridges that connect understanding and appropriation. The most recent examples of myth in movies, video games, and literature can be traced back to the ancient mythology of cultures all over the world. They are therefore used to convey cultural concepts and values to other societies that share media consumption. When media spreads through translation and audiences interact with it similarly everywhere—whether as authors or active participants or as passive viewers a cross-cultural consciousness arises.

Media has a massive potential to change the way we perceive Folklore and Myth. They are now considered the foundation of modern media, and with good reason. Tales are the foundation of new media versions, providing audiences with a tangible setting in which to enjoy modern tales through recurrent themes, plots, and archetypes. Contemporary narrative of Myths have shown us how cultures have not only grown but have adapted to the ever changing tastes of the viewers and have managed to enthrall the audiences.

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