



## National Seminar

### History, Myth and Orality: Cultural and Literary Traditions in India

14-15 November 2018

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi- 221005

Discussion on history, myth and orality in cultural and literary perspectives has drawn the attention of scholars for a long time. Interface of history-literature/culture in Indian cultural and literary tradition lays more emphasis on poetic intensity of “figural realism”, to use the terminology of Hayden White, which helps in the realization of dimensions of truth. Orality is a complex tradition that informs indigenous cultural nuances. Indigenous cultures are primarily oral and share common modes and means for production and preservation of important socio-religious customs and conventions. Unlike cultures based on writing, orality communicates through stories, dances and folklores. As an alternative tradition, it raises our consciousness, and is complementary to the written tradition rather than being the opposite. History reveals to us the objective truth without ambiguity. Myth, on the other hand, lacks this objective reality and depends on one’s beliefs. History concerns more with the retrieval of verifiable ‘facts’ and evidences from the past, whereas in myth, space and time are largely created in the mind as semblance of reality.

The new theoretical insights in the recent past have established new conventions on discourse of myth, history and orality. We have now numerous ‘possibilities’ of histories with porous territories which not only slacken the authority of history but also blur its boundary with fiction. We, therefore, talk of ‘truths’ and ‘nations’ instead of the Truth and the Nation. Paula Richman’s book *Many Ramayanas* and A.K. Ramanujan’s essay “Three Hundred Ramayanas” are a few examples of this shift. Similarly, *The Mahabharata* has also numerous versions, reminding us of Madhavacarya who speaks of ‘the text teeming with interpretations, interpolations and transpositions’. Thus, far from being primitive fictions, myths not only represent our instinctive understanding of collective/communal themes and motifs i.e. ‘archetypes’ but they also reflect contemporary reality profoundly. These ‘archetypes’ have been well preserved through orality during the age of illiteracy. Therefore, they form the main corpus of cultural as well as literary patterns in various human societies for which Northrop Frye says, “Literature develops out of mythology”. Attempts have been made time and again to challenge the grand narratives of history and myth in order to rationalize the cultural and literary experiences.

The cultural as well as literary tradition of India is deeply rooted in its past. Its history and mythology offer great motifs to understand its present. Revisiting history and mythology or reviving orality has been observed as a key trend among Indian scholars and authors. Re-presentation, re-interpretation and re-creation of historical and mythical episodes or characters can be observed in the works of several Indian authors. This revisionist approach in their writings could be seen as an attempt to challenge the western theorization of historiography. Apart from the reinterpretation of myth and history to reconstruct past reality of India, the narratives of two great epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, also occupy a major space in popular culture. It is noteworthy that the myth-making function of history underlies that dynamic force which can mould our social life, morality and culture. For instance, the myths in *Vedas* and *Puranas* are not limited to historical subjectivity but point to a holistic worldview.

In the light of the aforementioned, the present seminar seeks to debate, discuss and discourse on:

- i) the role and relevance of myth, history and orality in human society,
- ii) the new dimensions of contemporary Indian cultural and literary traditions, and
- iii) the future of myth, history and orality in Indian literature.

Papers and proposals are invited from the participants on the following sub-themes for deliberation. They are, however, suggestive, not restrictive.

**Sub –themes**

Culture, Community and Orality	Retelling of past and Media
Culture, Tradition and Values	History, Historicity and Historiography
Nation, Culture and Imagination	Myth Orality and Subaltern
Orality, Myth and Religion	Myth, History and Contemporaneity
History, Text and Power	History, Myth and Disability
Indigenous Literary and Cultural Traditions	Myth, Beliefs and Folklore
History, Myth, Orality and Pedagogy	Theorizing Culture and Literature
Literature, Culture and Identity	Literature, Culture and Tribal Identity

**Registration Fee**

Research scholars: Rs. 2000/-

Teachers: Rs. 3000/-

This will cover seminar kit, tea and lunch during the days of seminar. It does not include accommodation.

**Submission Guidelines**

Kindly submit the abstract of your paper in about 200 words (Times New Roman, Font size 12) with Keywords to [nationalseminareng18@gmail.com](mailto:nationalseminareng18@gmail.com). The abstract should contain title of the paper, name of the author (avoid titles such as Mr., Ms, Dr. etc), institutional affiliation and contact details. **Presentation of paper will be permitted only after the submission of full paper.** Selected papers will be published in the form of a book with ISBN.

**Deadlines**

Submission of Abstract: **5<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

Submission of full paper: **10<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

**About the Department**

Established in 1916, Banaras Hindu University is one of the leading universities in the world and the largest residential university in Asia. The illustrious founder of the University, Bharat Ratna Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had firm belief in the holistic model of education and that vision made the university a unique “capital of knowledge” where the East meets the West. The Department of English is a true embodiment of this vision. It has grown rapidly since its inception in 1916, and has played a major role in the intellectual life of the country.

**Travel and Climate**

The university is well connected by air, rail and road. It is nearly 33kms from Lalbahadur Shastri International Airport of Varanasi, 8 kms from Varanasi Railway Station/Bus-stand and 18kms from Mughalsarai Junction [ now DDU]. Pre-paid Taxis/auto rickshaws/cabs are available at all these locations. Weather of Varanasi is considered pleasant in the month of November with temperature ranging between 25 and 30 degrees Celsius.

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