

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

In the early age of human society, people gathered around the fire after a hard time catching animals for dinner. Elders told the tales of the sun and moon, why storms rage, how there are gods that make mountains, rivers, and animals they eat, and how, all of a sudden, there are things in this world. These stories are myths, often used to answer the mystery of creation and explain natural phenomena and human behavior, with gods, mystical creatures, magical items, and rituals as elements closely related to religion or spirituality (Bascom, 1965, p. 6).

Myth has many definitions among scholars alike; however, Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko, in Alan Dundes's book *Sacred Narrative: Reading the Theory of Myth*, offers definitions of the myth that are frequently cited: Myth, a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature, and culture were created together with all parts thereof and given their order, which still obtains. A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends, and establishes the sanctity of cult (Honko, 1972, as cited in Dundes, 1984, pp. 41-42).

Myth is a part of ancient tales; it's a broader category that includes myths, legends, folktales, and epics. It was the earliest form of storytelling used to answer natural phenomena, explore human relationships with its creator, and contain moral and cultural values. On the other hand, modern narratives, especially genres like fantasy, retain the core elements from ancient tales, such as the hero's journey and the battle between good and evil, and utilize these elements to provide a new perspective on these old themes.

Myth has been around since the dawn of civilization and originated in various cultures around the world; for example, Mesopotamian mythology, regarded as the oldest recorded myth, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, dated back to around 2100 BCE, follows king of Uruk Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu to find immortality (Mark, 2018), Greek, with the famous Heracles and Roman with Hercules, Norse, the apocalyptic events of Ragnarok, Egyptian, with the reign of sun god Ra, and Hindu with the story of Krishna.

All of the myths mentioned above differ from one another; for example, whilst Greek leans towards a more human-centered narrative with a clear distinction between humans and gods, Hindus have a vast, cyclical view of life, living in harmony with nature and ourselves, focusing on karma and dharma, and finding balance. Despite the clear distinction and view each of mythology has, they all have something in common, they got reinterpreted and retold through film and stories, they found their way to popular culture and gained so much popularity, which is why writer believe that going deeper and seeking the

significance of mythology in modern discourse is crucial and beneficial in many aspects.

One of the main sources in Hindu mythology is the epic *Mahabharata*, the epic narrates the story of the Kuru dynasty and the great Kurukshetra War, the story follows the five Pandava brothers and their struggle to reclaim the throne, and ultimately reaching Nirvana. it is the longest epic poem in the world, containing over 100,000 verses. its has left a profound impact on popular culture across various media for example the novel *The Palace of Illusion* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and even game such as Indus that currently on pre-registration period.

With the current development of human civilization, especially in literature, myth has now become “old.” like it or not, some authors try to integrate myth with modern narrative in order to preserve the value and cultural significance that myth holds and bring a breath of fresh air to thousand years old stories that ultimately became known as the fantasy genre. We can clearly see it in novels such as *Percy Jackson and the Olympians series* by Rick Riordan, *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman that adapted into TV series with a similar title, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.J.R Tolkien, and even in the film industry with Thor by marvel studios, *Loki series*, *Clash of Titans*, and *Wonder Woman*. These adaptations keep myths alive and relevant to this day.

The modern interpretations of myths, much like any contemporary story, represent contemporary values and concerns. Authors draw inspiration from ancient myths and frame it in a way that makes it relevant to modern audiences,

like how Wonder Woman represents a shift from traditional gender roles, portraying a strong and independent female heroine, or in *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* where the Characters live in a modern setting and with a diverse cast of characters from many ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds. Another story that actually does similar things to *Wonder Woman* and *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* combining myth with modern aspects, and gaining popularity that even Paramount Pictures bought the movie rights to this novel is *Aru Shah and the End of Time* by Roshani Chokshi.

Roshani Chokshi's *Aru Shah and the End of Time* is the first novel of the Pandava Quintet released in 2018 and was among the first out of many "Rick Riordan Presents" imprint books alongside novels such as *The Storm Runner* by J. C. Cervantes, *Dragon Pearl* by Yoon Ha Lee, *Race to the Sun* by Rebecca Roanhorse and many more, this book also included in the list of "100 Best Fantasy Books of All Time" by Time Magazine. According to Clemireads review of this book on wordpress.com entitled "Aru Shah and the End of Time: My Review," this book is well written, and it's a great first book in a fantasy middle-grade series (Clemireads, 2019). *Aru Shah and the End of Time* are heavily influenced by Hindu mythology, specifically Mahabharata. In this novel, the main character, 12-year-old Aru Shah, is one of the five reincarnations of the Pandava brothers. Her mission is to get the celestial weapons and prevent the Sleeper, the main antagonist, from awakening the God of Destruction, Shiva, to put an end to the world; throughout her journey, she faces different challenges and puzzles and fights alongside her companions to achieve her ultimate goal. This fact makes

writer believe that this novel can be further studied using the Monomyth Cycle or Hero's Journey Theory.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

In contemporary literature, there is considerable interest in how these ancient myths are being integrated into modern settings. Roshani Chokshi's *Aru Shah and the End of Time* is one example of this trend, merging traditional Indian myths with the everyday experiences of a young girl in today's world. Despite the book's popularity, there is limited scholarly research on how these archetypes are reinterpreted for modern audiences. Understanding this integration is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it deepens our understanding of how mythology continues to shape cultural identity, showing its relevancies and adaptability in a rapidly changing world. Secondly, this research enriches literary discourse by illustrating how ancient narratives are not only preserved but also transformed to address contemporary issues, therefore bridging the gap between the past and present.

1.3 Review of Related Studies

Roshani Chokshi's book *Aru Shah and the End of Time* was released in 2018. It is relatively young, so it does not come as a surprise that there is no research about this particular book, which is one of many reasons why the writer picked this novel as the main subject. However, many researchers have studied

the significance of mythology in modern literature, which aligns with the objective of this research.

The intertwining of mythology and literature has been a subject of scholarly interest, revealing the power of ancient narratives to shape and enrich modern storytelling. Works such as Tetiana Oleksandrivna Tsepka's "Conceptual Foundations of Modern Mythology" have delved into the role of myth in the process of mythopoeia, which is the creation of myths, establishing a foundation for our understanding of the impact of myths on the literary landscape. As Tsepka states in her article, "Both the author's own worldview and cultural motives are reflected indirectly through imaginative constructions (Tsepka, 2021, p. 2)". This means that myth is not simply a mere decoration; it's the author's way to convey a deeper meaning to the readers because myth is created within a centuries-long process across many civilizations or religions individually, making it become a "means of human existence"(Tsepka, 2021, p. 5).

The following work is included in the Journal of the Folklore Institute: "The Role of Mythology in Modern Literature" by Mark E. Workman, published by Indiana University Press in 1981. By exploring the role of mythology in modern literature, the author argues that mythology continues to be a powerful source of inspiration for writers, providing a rich and timeless reservoir of symbolism and archetypes and proving that mythology is still relevant in shaping literary expression (Workman, 1981). This is undoubtedly true in the case of Aru Shah's story; Chokshi draws inspiration from Hindu Mythology. However, this

also raises questions about how and why Choksi uses myth as the base of the story.

Next is an essay by James Cowan, “Myth and Modern Literature,” retrieved from academia.edu. It explores the significance of myth in the development and evolution of modern literature. These 20 pages of hard work highlight the importance of orality in the expansion of myths, how realism that arose since the 19th century kickstarted the Avant-Garde movement in the 20th century, and how the clash between these two helped mythologies to survive but in transformative ways, making myth remains relevant for modern writers as a vehicle for cultural reinforcement and affirmation (Cowan, 2015, pp. 4-8).

Another reference for this research is a collection of reviews on the Goodreads site (Aru Shah and the End of Time (Pandava, #1), n.d.). *Aru Shah and the End of Time* included in the Goodreads Choice Award: Nominee for Best Middle Grade & Children's (2018). It sure shows how enthusiastic people are towards this novel. Achieving 4.10 out of 5 on star reviews with more than 25.126 thousand participants, of which 3.878 are reviews. The majority of people on this site basically agree that the book *Aru Shah and the End of Time* is a great book. The author, Roshani Chokshi, really did a good job incorporating Hindu Mythology into her stories, making Hindu Mythology seem reachable and still relatable to the current age of society. One comment from Kav (xreadingsolacex) goes as far as saying that the book: “*Aru Shah and the End of Time* is not only one of the most important books I've ever read, it's also one of the best. From the plot to the characters to the writing, it is downright incredible in every way”.

“Kidsbookcafe” review of *Aru Shah and the End of Time* mentions how fascinating the incorporation of Hindu Mythology, more specifically *Mahabharata* in itself is complex, unlike *Ramayana*, another famous Indian epic that can be easily comprehended; one needs a lot of research and cross-check to write stories based on *Mahabharata*. However, there are some words in the story that are actually based on Sanskrit and are mispronounced, for example at one point of the story it mentioned saat as six, perhaps the author intention is shat (six in Sanskrit) but now it sounds like the Hindi-wala saat-the number 7. In addition, this review mentioned the ambiguity of word Raksha for a demon as Raksha in Sanskrit would mean to protect while rakshasa would mean demon, perhaps it flaws on the author side (Seethalakshmi (aka) Preethi, 2021).

According to the webpage “Metaphors and Miscellanea” (Kathryn, 2020) she stated that this was “a cute and enjoyable read, for sure, with a delightful voice, a feisty and salty protagonist who was a little too relatable, and so much mythological fun.” Although that this book is obviously heavily influenced by Hindu mythology the way Chokshi write made is easy to follow along. The writer only had two complaints about the book that I quote “some of the humour was a little bit too childish,” which is acceptable given the fact that it is a middle-grade book, and secondly, the writer felt there are few parts that felt overly rushed, in contrast of how Kathryn saw the humour on this novel, Katie on his blog entitled “Middle-Grade Review: Aru Shah and the End of Time” stated “Chokshi nailed the humor that made Riordan’s books so successful. Aru is a lot like Percy: impulsive, kind of an outsider, basically no vocabulary” (Katie, 2020, para.6)

Kate Quealy-Gainer, in “Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books,” Johns Hopkins University Press, states that much like her other YA books *The Star-Touched Queen* and *A Crown of Wishes*, Chokshi weaves together elements of Hindu mythology and Indian folklore to create an engaging fantasy, this time focuses on a younger audience and a theme of sisterhood, stack with plenty of humour, as Aru and Mini face with demon that absorbs beauty, bargain with the Seasons, and get help from gods (Quealy-Gainer, 2018, p. 328). Another news surrounding the Journey of Aru is the article “Interview: Roshani Chokshi's 'Aru Shah and the End of Time' is set to introduce Hindu mythology to Hollywood for the first time ever” (Tripathi, 2018), on this news is stated that Paramount Pictures in April 2018 won the movie rights for this novel in a brutal action battle with Netflix and the studio also said Aru Shah has a potential for a franchise with a mix of *Wizard of Oz* and *Coco*, with a touch of *Night at the Museum*. Tripathi also states that “the novel has brought into play the untapped world of Hindu mythology and its intriguing figures who assist the young heroine on a journey which is riddled with contemporary pop culture references” (Tripathi, 2018).

The following news, unlike others before, describes how Roshani Chokshi ended up writing *Aru Shah and the End of Time*. Gwenda Bond in Los Angeles Times wrote article entitled “How Roshani Chokshi came to write a new series for Rick Riordan” This news shows that this novel is Chokshi’s redemption of earlier attempt of making *Sailor Moon* fan fiction infused with Indian Mythology, she said “To me, it called back all that nostalgia for the things I had desperately wanted to write, and also it was a chance to redo middle school. So, I went home

that day and emailed my agent immediately.” (Bond, 2018, para. 2). On this online newspaper, Chokshi also shares her similarities with character Aru on the stories “I also went to private school, where I certainly felt out of my depth with kids that didn’t get their uniform and books from the consignment shop and all that stuff. And I certainly told many a tall tale,” (Bond, 2018, para. 6)

1.4 Research Questions

In an attempt to make this research relevant to the scope and limitation, one believes stating questions to be answered on this research is a must, following is the question that the writer wants to answer:

1. What are Hindu mythological references in *Aru Shah and the End of Time*?
2. What is the significance of mythological archetypes in the character development and plot progression of *Aru Shah and the End of Time* and how are these archetypes reinterpreted for a modern audience?

1.5 Scope of the Research

Our research is guided by a central question: What cultural and thematic significance does Hindu mythology hold within the narrative framework of *Aru Shah and the End of Time*, and how does the interplay between Hindu mythology and modern literature occur in the story? This question is rooted in the recognition of a research gap in the comprehensive analysis of the specific Hindu mythological elements in the novel and their impact on the narrative dynamics. Along the way, this research will also provide an analysis of mythological archetypes that can be seen throughout the journey.

1.6 Objective of the Research

The first aim of the research is to find the significance of mythology in the novel, which can help to preserve and give mythological aspects more recognition in modern narrative. By applying established theories of Hero's Journey writer seeks to shed light on the ways in which mythology enriches the storytelling landscape.

At the peak of our exploration, this particular study aims to provide a full understanding of the interplay between mythology and contemporary literature. By dismantling the roles of characters, unraveling symbolic nuances, and tracing the hero's transformative journey, writer aspire to contribute valuable insights to the significance of mythology in modern storytelling.

