Sexing the Devi: Morphology of the mythic-fantastic in Ahalya(s) and Chitrangada(s)

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Abstract: Myths and fantasy are two of the most indispensable and widely consumed literary genres for every

civilisation. These two literary/cultural forms partake in a rather curious correlation with each other. While myths are a product of cultural authorship, that authorises certain cultural norms arising through its narrative; fantasy is a literature of desire that revels in the free play of imagination and expression that are often outrageously subversive. Yet, the universes constructed by myth and fantasy are conspicuously structured on similar strategies and modality. It is this structural similitude between myth and fantasy that this paper dissects, in order to illustrate that myths are not simply a product of cultural authorship but more importantly of cultural fantasy that is propagated as symbolic truths. This paper particularly examines Indian mythological system through the myths of Ahalya and Chitrangada and their cinematic renditions, to excavate the underlying fantasy embedded within its narrative and the import of its reception.

Keywords: Fantasy, metamorphosis, Ahalya, Chitrangada, Indian mythology.

Introduction

The Original Sin, partaken by Adam and Eve as they bit into the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, is perhaps the oldest story about certain instinctual human behaviours. The act of disobedience that endangers their blissful security stems from the human proclivity to desire- a predisposition that overrides even the sanctitude of Paradise. The desire to know, to do, to be. It is perhaps this accurate encapsulation of human behaviour, that this story has undergone a metonymic displacement from its Biblical origin to pop-cultural iconography ranging from John Milton's "fan-fiction" of the Bible in *Paradise Lost* (1667), to "Newton's Apple Tree" till the multinational technological propulsion of Apple phones and computers. Such a marketed consumption of the opening

chapters of the Book of Genesis, emphasise two of the most primeval social behaviours- the creation/reception/absorption of stories and the inclination to desire. Thus, it is no wonder that the etymological root of the word "myth" is the Greek *mythos* that translates to "story"; and "fantasy" derived from the Greek *phantasia* means "imagination" or "make visible" that which is fantasised/desired.

Literatures of myth and fantasy delineate this human impulse of story-telling and desiring that are irretrievably osmotic to each other and vital to community composition. The generic categorisation of fantasy literature combines the gestalt of stories and desires by drawing from myths, folklores and fairy tales that act as its bedrocks. Writers, readers and critics note that myths are a particularly conducive source, when formulating the norms and conventions surrounding the fantasy world. This paper aims to further examine this co-relation to argue that, myth and fantasy are not only overlapping and interspersed generic categories rather the morphological formation of myths follow a *Matryoshka[1]* doll-like structure. Myths have at its base an underlying fantasy that is formulated, cultivated and propagated through the cultural acceptance of its mythic-fantastic narrative. This paper closely examines the Indian mythological system, specifically the myth of *Ahalya* and *Chitrangada*, to dissect elements of fantasy and fantastic. Further, this paper looks at the cinematic rendition of these two myths to illustrate, how by re-situating the myth in an alternate spatial and temporal dimension, there occurs a re-insertion of an "Other" fantasy.

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[1] A Russian originated doll, popularly known for its craft of containing subsequent smaller figurines of the same sort inside. Used here for its metaphoric significance of harbouring multiple structures within itself.

Words and Meanings

Claude Levi Strauss in "The Structural Study of Myth" delineates an approach to understanding myths as a language. He asserts "myth *is* language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech" (Strauss 430). Strauss' structuralist methodology to study myth as language, implies that myth creation and circulation are as involuntary an organic behaviour as the instinct to communicate (as Steven Pinker titled his book, *The Language Instinct*). Mythology is an organised system, constituting of myths that are stories weaved from and within the cultural ethos of the social order of things. These created narratives provide an oblique code of references to norm, behaviour and conduct- that are imbibed by each generation as quasi-gospels. Dr. Otto Rank in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Interpretation of Mythology* deems creativity to be the origin of myths, the self-same creative capacity that build dreams and at extreme leads to neurosis. He finds affinity between the mechanics of dreaming (that Sigmund Freud propounded) and myth-making, as he argues,

> The latter [Freud] helps us not only to understand dreams themselves, but also show their symbolism and close relationship with all psychic phenomenon in general, especially with the day dreams or phantasies, with artistic creativeness, and with certain disturbances of the normal psychic function. A share of these productions belongs to a single psychic function, the human imagination. It is this imaginative faculty- of humanity at large rather than individual- that the modern myth theory is obliged to concede a high rank, perhaps the first, for the ultimate origin of all myths. (Rank 14)

The symbolic world of the myth, is thus actively constructed to advertise and reinforce the dominant community values. It is perhaps this creative energy inherent in myths, that Rank calls it "a dream of the masses of the people" (12). It is precisely this creative energy of myths that makes it so amenable to the fantasy genre, which is also a force of creativity and has close synonymous association to "dreams".

The genre of fantasy relies heavily on what Coleridge claimed as the "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (169). Readers must engage in voluntary belief despite conspicuous doubt regarding the possibility and plausibility of the fantasy world. One of the strategies that fantasy genre engages with to maintain the compliance of its readers, is to hark back on the schematics of myth. Brian Attebery notes that readers "recognize that fantasy employs the mechanisms of the sacred: prophecy, miracle, revelation, transformation" (17); elements recognizable in mythic tales. Popular fantasy representations not only inculcate myths within them, but also reconfigure and re-contextualize them in their fantasy world. Celtic myths within J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympian* series appropriates Greco-Roman mythology and the Norse myth of Thor, his hammer and Loki, appealingly re-envisioned in *Marvel's The Avenger* film series- are all enormously consumed mythic-fantasy Universes. Along with mythic re-working, the fantasy genre in turn creates mythic narratives and archetypes, such as the "Superman"[2], "the Boy who lived"[3] and "Azor Ahai"[4] to name a few. It appears that not only does the fantasy genre draw inspiration from the mythic but also encroaches it; such that

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[2] Fictional superhero under the DC Comics.

[3] The epithet given to the titular protagonist Harry Potter in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

[4] Legend of a hero-saviour mentioned in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* universe.

the boundaries between myth and fantasy become increasingly osmotic. This compels us to reconsider the correlative nature of these two anthropological units.

Brian Attebery defined the fantasy genre as what he calls "fuzzy set: categories defined not by a clear boundary or any defining characteristic but by resemblance to a single core example or group of examples (*strategies*)" (108). It is this characteristic of "fuzzy sets" that makes it probable that, there is not simply a unidirectional route of fantasy drawing from myths, but also myth as a modality of fantasy. If Attebery duly notes that "one can find myth *in* fantasy" (20), the converse may also be true: one can find *fantasy* in myth. On probing the morphological system of myth, one can observe that myths are the primal fantasy genre. The mythic is fantastic.

Generic Tactics

The sustenance of the fantasy genre is contingent on an implicit agreement of acceptance between the readers and the writer, such that "[f]antasy is a game, and a game of rituals" (Attebery 204). It is a game that requires the contract of rules and customs to be maintained and assimilated by the readers. Such that, Tolkien's Middle-earth, Lewis' Narnia, Rowling's Hogwarts or Martins' Westeros exist due to this willing participation on the readers' part. It follows with the mythic order of Universe as well. The community that authorises the narrative, uphold it through the ritual practice of believing the myth to have a substantial degree of sanctitude. While the space and time of the myth are considered as "that world" and "that time" which may or may not have existed; each receiver of the myth strengthen their membership to the community by tutoring themselves to believe in the validity of the mythic worldview. The actuality of Tartarus, Mount Olympus, Mount

Sinai, Eden, *Patala-lok[5]*, *Kurukshetra[6]*, *Ashok-vatika[7]* are beyond question; rather their spatial actualization is gauged by their symbolic position in the myth.

A discussion on mythology and myths would be incomplete without referring to Thomas Bulfinch's *Mythology* (1881), originally titled *The Age of Fable* (1855). His original title is particularly intriguing as it situates myths in another "age". Drawing similitude to Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories" (1947) that formulates certain axioms for the fantasy genre, specifically the presence of a secondary world that is governed by its own spatial and temporal dimensions-often alien from our immediate world. Yet, there is also an implicit acknowledgement that this created "other" world is a refracted representation of the real world. Levi Strauss also notes on similar lines that,

> *A myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages- anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. (430)*

Members of a community who subscribe to the symbolic order denoted by myths, much like a reader of fantasy literature, know that the "Other" world has its essence and relevance rooted in their present reality. The created world in the myth is further charged with historical, religious and moral implications. Thus, as cultural receivers of a community's

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[5] According to Hindu cosmology, the Universe is divided in three regions or *loks*; namely *Swarga lok* (heaven), *Prithvi Lok* (Earth/mortal) and *Patala lok* (hell).

[6] Known as the site where the Great Battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas took place, in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata.*

[7] The garden in the kingdom of Ravana, where Sita was held captive, in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*

myth, they are aware that despite spatial-temporal alienation, these myths cannot be divorced from their present world. Rather these mythic narratives have substantial influence in governing the ideological schema of the present. Ultimately, to cohesively tie the narrative to the structure, the fantasy genre employs strategic elements of magic, metamorphosis, symbolism, ambiguity and inexplicability. Needless to say, "in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen" (Strauss 429), thereby employing the self-same strategies of fantasy fiction.

Despite these undeniable points of convergences between myth and fantasy, there is a glaring difference that separates them. Andras Sandor notes that,

> [m]yths…are true stories for those who so believe them. They are asserted and so considered. The widest circumference of the pragmatic context is the world shared by the people who assert a given story to be true. (346)

Myths are designed as an authority claiming metaphoric history. They are simultaneously authorized with a socio-cultural Truth value; and also authorize its receivers with the power to advocate its timeless history. Their metaphoric historicity lends myths to become stories on cultural conventional order.

Meanwhile, readers of fantasy literature remain in complete self-awareness about the craft of playful linguistic and imaginative construction engaged by the writer. The fantasy genre may be about re-arranging history and re-examining the present; but it would never claim to be an authority on Truth. In fact, the very invention of the fantasy genre was to deny an authoritative Truth. Keeping this distinction in mind, it would be unacceptable to consider myths as a fantasy. It would be a sociologically incorrect supposition of their co-relation. Yet, we cannot ignore that myths contain the self-same axioms and

strategies of fantasy genre. The constituting elements of the fantasy genre within myth cannot be for naught. Unless, the structure of myths can be viewed like a *Matryoshka* doll- a Russian originated doll that contains another doll inside it and the process repeats with each subsequent doll that gets smaller in size. The mythic structure can be examined as harbouring subterranean fantasy/ies that are actualised through the fantastic elements of the narrative. The community's collective consciousness has imbibed the socio-historic value of the myths, that it often renders them unconscious to the possibility of fantasy/ies operating underneath it. Now the question arises: What is the fantasy? What purpose do these fantasy/ies play? How does it affect the reception of the myth?

His or Her Story?

Consider the following narratives. On asked to prove her purity for the second time, she refuses and implores the Earth to absorb her. Abandoning her wifely and maternal duties, she chooses resistance against patriarchy. And yet, Sita is apotheosized as a symbol of chastity and domesticity. She disobeyed her father's authority by exercising her choice to select a spouse herself, immolating herself in the adamance of her choice. And now, Sati[8] is transformed into a custom that celebrates the effacement of the wife. Medusa was a ravishingly beautiful maiden, who chose the life of a priestess, much to the disappointment of her aspiring suitors. To punish her for her choice, she was raped in the temple she prayed and if that were not enough to deter her will to desire, she was cursed into a petrifying monster.

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[8] Sati is the Hindu goddess who was considered to be the first wife of Shiva. Also, developed as a historical custom of widow immolation practiced in India.

Myths all over the world have women like Cassandra,
Philomela, Kannaki,9 Durga and Kali- who share a similar
story. The underlying strain that connects these myths is the
metamorphosis of the woman's body, either through
castigation or apotheosis, in order to appropriate her conduct
into the patriarchal imagination of womanhood. Observation
of patterns in myth are pivotal in their interpretation since
"bundles of such relations" are not secluded rather "only as
bundles [can] these relations be put to use and combined so as
to produce a meaning" (Strauss 431). There is a violent and
forceful metamorphosis of the woman's body in myths, that is
intended to contain femininity, desire and sexuality to such an
extent so as to attempt to annihilate its presence altogether.
Rosemary Jackson in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of
Subversion* observes that the production of fantasy
"characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting
from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which
seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (2). The
fulfilment of this "lack" or "unattainability" is vicariously
experienced through the tools of the fantastic, primarily of
metamorphosis where "[m]en transforming into women,
children changing into birds or beasts, animal interchanging
plants, rocks, trees, stones.... have constituted one of the
primary pleasures of the fantasy mode" (Jackson 47). The
pattern of metamorphosis apparent in the aforementioned
myths and many others points to a phallocentric desire for the
containment, if not possible elimination of the feminine. It is a
fantasy of an androcentric re-production of world-order. This
patriarchal investment in the underlying fantasy of myths, is
also aware of the biological impossibility of a world without

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9 The central character of the Tamil epic *Silapathikaram*, where Kannaki is
described as a woman of strength and endurance despite her husband's infidelity,
bankruptcy and later undue death on false accusations. In her wrath, she plucks
her left breast and throws it to the society as retribution and later turned into a
Goddess of chastity.

the feminine; and thus, conspires all means to reduce her presence to her sexualised body, thereby neglecting all her immense unbridled energy.

This paper focuses on two Indian myths centred around metamorphosis, namely Ahalya and Chitrangada. There are two kinds of metamorphoses at play. Ahalya was cursed to turn into a stone, thereby forcefully imposing a transformation. While Chitrangada willingly transforms herself into a woman, in order to be accepted as a suitable bride by Arjun. Both the metamorphoses accomplish the desire for a heterosexual patriarchal model of womanhood that is as invisible, marginal and silenced as possible. In this modality of fantasy, the woman's body is the site of deviance. It is the body that must go through all forms of tribulations, effacement and apotheosis. So that, the deviance in the form of female desire, agency or wrath is quarantined. Judith Butler theorizes "the matter of bodies as a kind of materialization governed by regulatory norms in order to ascertain the workings of heterosexual hegemony in the formation of what qualifies as a viable body" (Butler. 24). This materialization is achieved "through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (12). She further argues that "social construction of the natural presupposes the cancellation of the natural by the social" (14). As is the nature of fantasy, it aims at a subversion of the norm(al), making probable that which is improbable and making natural that which is unnatural. The fantasy within the myths of Ahalya and Chitrangada does indeed subverts the natural inclination of the feminine capacity to desire, choose and be. Mythmaking, to repeat, is also fantasy creation, cultivation and installation; and such a phallocentric mythic-fantastic construction indoctrinates the community with a noxious patriarchal ideology.

Her Stories

Ahalya is a mythological character in the Indian epic, *Ramayana*. She was known for her extraordinary beauty and for marrying a much-aged ascetic, Gautam Maharishi. Ravished by her youth and his lust for her, Indra, the King of Gods (much like his Greek counterpart Zeus), disguises himself as Gautam and seduces her. Ahalya is cursed for infidelity by her husband and turned into a stone; where she can only be liberated after Lord Ram's foot touches it.

The intercourse out of wedlock, cursed into a stone and redemption by Lord Ram are the persistent episodes to this myth, whereas other complimentary details undergo major variations across scriptural textual presentations. Wendy Doniger studies the varying versions of the myth across scriptures including *Ramayana* to *Kathasaritasagar* (The Ocean of the Rivers of Story) to *Padma Purana* to *Ganesh Purana*, to note that marital relation between Ahalya and Gautam and the extra-marital engagement with Indra are issues of great contention (25). Firstly, Ahalya literally translates to "the uncultivable", perhaps because she is not a seed born out of the union of man and woman. It was Brahma[10] that moulded her into a beautiful woman. Her birth itself symbolises a fantastic androcentric re-production that omits the woman. Secondly, Doniger states that Brahma places her under the guardianship of Gautam until she reaches pubescence. Pleased with Gautam's sexual restraint, he gifts Ahalya as his wife. Doniger notes that their marriage is a celibate one where, Gautam copulates with Ahalya only during her fertile season, more as a duty than volition (43). This leads to the contested issue, whether Ahalya saw through Indra's masquerade and yet chose to consummate adulterously or she

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[10] In Hindu mythological worldview, Brahma is the creator of the Universe, while Vishnu is the preserver and Shiva is the destroyer.

was hoodwinked by Indra into thinking it as a conjugal consummation. The former is not altogether improbable, as Doniger notes, that "Ahalya's complicity" (if at all) is consequent of "Gautam's inadequacies" (43). Either way, she is cursed into a stone whose logic resonates to "the practice of depicting voluptuous women in the stone sculptures on Hindu temples: it is the best way to capture and control them" (Doniger 39). In fact, this desire to contain and eliminate the feminine is present in Ahalya's marriage itself that quarantines her sexual urges in an "uncultivable" marriage and later into an inanimate stone. She is commodified in an unfair "dominant phallic economy" (Irigaray, 24). Helene Cixous rightly asked, "Where is she?" (Cixous, 63). Her subjectivity is contained between the man who seduced her, the man who cursed her and the man who liberated her. Ahalya's sexuality is an object of myth and fantasy for Gautam and Indra, respectively.

Director Sujoy Ghosh re-situates this myth in the contemporary world, in his short film *Ahalya* (2015). The mythic-fantastic of the original myth is supposed to have occurred in the *treta yuga*. Indian mythological system looks at space and time in terms of *yuga*[11] or ages. The *treta yuga*, coming after the *satya yuga*, assumes the qualities of deterioration from the purity of the previous age-dramatized by lust, ravishment, curses-as seen Ahalya's story. The film, representing the contemporary times, can be said to belong to the *kali yuga* (the age of discord and evil) cues the audience into the reality of the 21st century upper middle-class Kolkata. In this mythic adaptation, a police inspector named Indra Sen

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[11] In Hinduism, a *yuga* is closely understood as an epoch. There are four *yugas* chronologically denoted as: *Satya Yuga* (age of purity where the divine lived with the humans), *treta yuga* (morality is reduced to stand on three legs with onset of immorality), *dwapara yuga* (further deterioration of morality remaining on only two pillars) and finally *kali yuga* (the last and present age of discord, disharmony and corruption).

(played by Tota Roy Chaudhury) arrives at the house of a renowned sculptor called, Goutom Sadhu (played by the veteran Soumitra Chatterjee), to inquire about a missing person. He is immediately besotted by Goutom's much younger wife, Ahalya (played by the versatile Radhika Apte). Goutom sculpts miniature dolls modelled after real people. He also possesses a stone that he claims, can magically disguise a person's appearance. The stone, then becomes an element of the fantastic that invades into our erstwhile comfortable perception of the ordinary household of a Bengali sculptor. A stone that is not only fantastic but also signals back to the mythic origins of the film. He coaxes Inspector Indra to try this mythic-fantastic stone and go to Ahalya, since he does not believe in its magical properties. Disguised as Goutom, Indra embraces Ahalya after which the scene turns dark. Indra has metamorphosized as a doll in Goutom's doll collection, and Goutom and Ahalya welcome another guest, their next prey.

This "Other" mythic-fantasy of the film makes a drastic departure from its original androcentric mythic-fantasy. In this elaborate theatrical trap, Ahalya is the actor and the director. For a change, she is the master in this game. Her feigned ignorance as she chides the dolls, her naïve vulnerability and her infantile posture are an act. She self-consciously performs the role of an "ideal Hindu wife" who is contained by her husband and ignorant of the ways of the world. While in the end, the viewers realize that she is the possessor of knowledge. She is an extremely self-aware subject, who manipulates her body so that she is gazed by Indra, thereby controlling the male gaze. She wears a white summer dress that treads between virginal purity and unbridled sexuality, using her body language to initiate seduction, ever so carelessly; while in the myth Indra possessed the most knowledge and agency. By performing the performance of an "ideal Hindu woman", this Ahalya categorically defies appropriate gender performance. She is a

sexual subject with a body, rather than a sexualized object. In fact, it is Indra who is transformed into a doll, which is a definitive symbol of sexual vulnerability usually associated with woman. In one of the scenes, Goutom says "They say I'm one of the best artists in the world. No. Without my wife I'm nothing". In adapting the myth to our contemporary space and time, the short film displaces its androcentric fantasy with an "Other" fantasy-an imagination of a marriage of equal partnership-where the feminine is not effaced. Here, the feminine is an active artist in the act.

Chitrangada was the princess of what is present-day Manipur, whose myth appears in the *Mahabharata*, believed to portray the *Dvapara yuga*. Her forefathers received a boon of having a son in each generation. Yet her father, Chitravahana, on receiving a daughter raises her like a son. It is on seeing Arjun[12], that she feels the need to transform into a stunning woman. Her father approves to this nuptial on the condition that the son born from them would be the heir to the kingdom of Manipur. The myth clearly shows that gender is performative and this performance is continually learnt and thus can be unlearnt, as well. Director Rituporno Ghosh's autobiographical film, *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*, is the story of Rudra (played by Rituporno Ghosh himself) who embodies Chitrangada's predicament, in the present *kali yuga*. Rudra was born a boy, so his father wanted him to be an engineer. Instead, Rudra defies patriarchal gender norms and chooses to be a dancer, theatre director and a homosexual. He is directing the play *Chitra* (1913) written and adapted by Rabindranath Tagore from the original myth, when he meets Partho[13] (played by Jishu Sengupta). In his relationship with Partho, while casually talking about adopting a child, Rudra

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[12] The third brother of the Pandavas clan, a prominent protagonist in the epic *Mahabharata*.

[13] Interestingly, Arjun from the *Mahabharata* was also known as Parth. Note the wordplay on the mythic origins of the character.

realizes that he wishes to be what he truly is-a woman; and opts for sex reassignment surgery. The film delineates his physical, psychological, emotional and social quest to choose a Body of his own.

The film is a bricolage of three mythic narratives running simultaneously. The first level is the myth of Chitrangada, whose metamorphosis is a return to the appropriate heterosexual binary. The androgynous princess raised with "masculine qualities of courage, ability to govern and lack of timidity" (Ramaswamy, 12) is integrated as a submissive wife suitable for marriage. Her father's demand of a son from this marriage completely reduces her to her biological function. This again begs the question, "Where is she? Either she is passive or she does not exist" (Cixous, 63). If she is not passive, she is made to not exist. Yet again, the stubborn fantasy to efface feminine energy to such a limit so to perform only that, which the masculine (despite all attempts) cannot. At the next level, we have the play choreographed by Rudra, *Chitra* written by Tagore. Tagore portrays Chitrangada's metamorphosis from a *kuroopa* (un-womanly) to a *suroopa* (splendidly womanly) as the magical fulfilment of a prayer she asks from Madan, the God of Love. She wished to become a *suroopa* so that Arjun would fall in love with her, which he does. Yet, she realizes that this metamorphosis and the love gained is an illusion. It is a falsehood from her True Self. Tagore shows that the body is ephemeral, it is the Self which is True. The fantasy imagined in this dramatic adaptation of the myth is that, the Self is both masculine and feminine and thus transcends binaries. Towards the end of the play, Arjun accepts Chitrangada for who she truly is, as courageous as she is passionate. The film's protagonist, Rudra's story is a twice removed narrative and resembles a tale of quest. His metamorphosis indicates a disruption of gender performance and assuming the True Self. Rudra's quest for a re-assigned body dawns the realisation that the recognition of the True

Self comes through the identification with the Body. In a particular scene, actress Raima Sen who plays Kasturi, a performer in the theatre group, who is in turn playing the role of Chitrangada in the choreographed play, is unable to act masculine enough, during the rehearsal. She says that since she is rehearsing in a *saree*, she finds it difficult to act like a man. This shows that the extraneous Body makes the individual's identity as much as the inner Self does. The body politics is not conditioned on sex, rather on gender norms. Rudra's attempt to un-define his sexuality and self-define it outside of phallocentricism, is the re-textualized mythic-fantasy. Dance plays an integral role in the film that gives the Body and its movement the liberty to be the desired "Other". Unlike the myth, the film does not reduce the Body to its biological function, rather dismantles the biological determinism. The dance sequences in the film give a sense of Helene Cixous's "jouissance" where there is pleasure in being boundless. The film does not portray the Body as a given, rather engages the body with the process of definition, identification and interpellation. In a scene, the nurse in the hospital constantly refers to Rudra as "Sir", despite having had his breast implants. To which, Rudra politely requests not to be called Sir or Ma'am, instead he says "Call me, Rudra", thereby disrupting the heterosexual hegemonic discourse.

Conclusion

The *matryoshka* doll-like structure of myths is evident in the cinematic adaptation of myths, as well. This re-situating of myths in "our" world, uses some noticeable strategies for re-inserting an alternate fantasy. Firstly, is the defiance of gender performativity that suggests an alternative discourse of desire? Secondly, is the recovery of subjecthood, making the characters extremely self-aware. The fantasy re-placement does not simply involve an inversion of the myth, rather

makes visible desire and sexuality, in turn recognising the woman as an active agent to define her femininity. Thirdly and lastly, art becomes the instrument of fantasy fulfilment. It is not a coincidence that both the films use artistic medium of sculpting, dancing and theatre to retort the source myth. Fantastic expression shows the undeniable importance of representation and gives liberty to de-centre the norm, by exposing the constructivism of structural systems. The source myth and its originally ordained fantasy, when telescoped into the 21st century space-time dimension, presents a pressing need to adjust it into an "Other" mythic-fantasy. This allows the scope for the receivers of this "Other" mythic-fantasy to interrogate their erstwhile socio-historic vision. It is artistic re-productions such as these which portray that feminine sexuality is not a myth. By inserting the self-explorative energy of womanhood, the haunting question begins to be answered. Where is she? She is here.

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She is an avid reader, writer and editor who is always
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Besides researching, she spends her time travelling the city
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