

# How mythology stood test of time after being reinvented

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

The Literature Live! Festival in Mumbai opened on Friday with a discussion titled *Mythology Reborn* in which writers discussed how mythology has constantly been reinvented and passed on and thus stays alive in our consciousness.

Amitabh Tripathi, author of the bestseller *The Immortals of Malabar*, a book which looks at Shiva as a man and a warrior, as distinct from a God, said that for the longest time, Indian mythology was accessible only to children through Amar Chitra Katha. Or, then, there were the religious texts churned out by Gita Press, Gorakhpur. But there has been very little available for the contemporary English-speaking adult market which is now looking for a new way of connecting to its collective past. "As India grows more confident as a country, we want to know more about our myths," said the management consultant.

Ashwin Sanghi, a businessman, who has written *The Bharat Line*, drawing connections between Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, said, "We live in an age of re-

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Amitabh Tripathi | AUTHOR

mixes. Books like these are presenting the same information, but in a more palatable form. We want our heritage served to us, not in a *katort* or *patra*, but on a plate, with a fork and knife. As we modernise as a society, we want to explore our ancient connectivities." He pointed out that myth has always been open to reinterpretation, especially as it is an oral tradition that gets passed on. But like Chinese Whispers, with each generation adds its own 'tadka' to the deal, so to speak.

Columnist and brand spo-

talist Sanjosh Desai noted that even Hindi cinema has strong elements of mythology in it - there are staple characters, like the hero is always the same Vicky Malhotra and the heroine is the same and the mother is the same - and there is always the theme of anxiety and separation, much like *vanavās*. There is another reason that mythology resonates in contemporary times. "It has an element of magic in it," he says, which fits in with the hype technology and digital times we live in.

Later in the evening, veteran journalist BK Verghese and Kumar Ketkar, a prominent newspaper editor, discussed the former's new book, *First Draft: Witness to the Making of Modern India* in a session titled

'The Insider Book'. Most of the discussion hinged on the politically tumultuous 1970s. Ketkar rested off a list of upheavals: the Bangladesh war, Salvador Allende's assassination, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's assassination, the Emergency, the Vietnam war and so on. As Ketkar wryly

put it, "Most of the political leadership did not die natural deaths."

Verghese in the 1960s had served as press advisor to Indira Gandhi till he realised that he was expected to be more of a public relations officer than advisor. "When I walked out of South Block on December 31, 1968, I felt liberated," he said. He recalled the '70s as one in which the light of democracy that had been lit after Independence was extinguished and lit again. He was referring to the Emergency when the press was severely censored and Indira Gandhi's subsequent electoral defeat.

Verghese also spoke about his experiences of working in the country's three top papers: The Times of India, Hindustan Times and the Indian Express. He topped off the evening reading a couple of passages on the corruption spawned by Prohibition, a time whose repercussions can be felt even today. The last passage was a fun anecdote on the stern Morarji Desai, who was once persuaded by his colleagues to pay an educational visit to a nightclub where, to his horror, a "dame" sat on his lap.

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## Panel in M

Sandhya Na

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Vasai has had sporadic incidents