



Mythic AI: Intersections of Indian Mythology and Artificial Intelligence in Post-2000 Indian English Novels

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ABSTRACT

In the twenty-first century, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged not only as a transformative force in science and technology but also as a profound stimulus for literary imagination, particularly in the context of Indian English novels written since 2000. These texts do not merely speculate about intelligent machines but embed them within a philosophical and spiritual framework shaped by Indian traditions. Concepts such as *karma* (action and consequence), *dharma* (moral duty), *moksha* (liberation), and *avatars* (divine incarnations) are intricately woven into narratives where AI evolves from a mechanical entity into a being capable of ethical reflection and existential inquiry. Unlike Western literary portrayals, where AI often embodies existential threat, loss of identity, or the dangers of unchecked rationalism, Indian English fiction tends to reframe AI as a possible extension of universal consciousness. Here, machines are not dehumanising agents but symbolic mirrors of the sacred. Central to these narratives are philosophical questions with roots in Indian metaphysics: Can an artificial being attain spiritual insight? Could a sentient machine embody *dharma* or pursue *moksha*? These are not merely imaginative musings, but rather literary engagements with enduring cultural and ethical discourses, offering a hopeful and inspiring vision of the future. This paper examines how post-2000 Indian English authors reinterpret AI through mythic and metaphysical lenses. Through an analysis of



selected texts, the study reveals how these writers indigenise global science fiction tropes, transforming AI from a sterile technological subject into a vessel of narrative, ethical, and cultural richness. Mythology is not invoked as a retreat into the past but as a dynamic epistemological system that frames and critiques the implications of technological progress.

1. Introduction-

In the evolving landscape of twenty-first-century literature, the convergence of mythology and technology has emerged as a strikingly original motif, particularly within Indian English fiction. Among various technological symbols, Artificial Intelligence (AI) stands out as both a narrative device and philosophical metaphor, reflecting anxieties and aspirations surrounding identity, consciousness, and existence. Since the year 2000, Indian writers have increasingly turned to speculative fiction to explore the interaction between deeply rooted mythological systems and futuristic technologies, producing literary terrains where ancient metaphysics meets digital intelligence. Far from being a superficial fusion, this engagement represents a nuanced inquiry into how cultural memory and technological imagination shape our understanding of the human and the posthuman. Central to this paper is an exploration of how Indian English novels reinterpret AI within the frameworks of Indian mythology, resulting in not only fresh narrative forms but also new philosophical trajectories for posthuman storytelling.

Indian mythology, with its vast repertoire of symbols, archetypes, and ethical discourses, offers a framework that transcends the purely religious. It functions as a philosophical system that contemplates life, duty, transformation, and liberation. Concepts such as *karma* (the principle of action and consequence), *dharma* (righteous duty), *moksha* (liberation from rebirth), and *avatars* (divine manifestations) naturally lend themselves to questions about agency, accountability, and spiritual evolution. In contrast, AI as conceptualised in literature is often viewed through the lens of the posthuman. Posthumanism is a theoretical perspective that explores the blurring boundaries between organic and artificial, conscious and programmed, in the realm of AI. It is a key framework in this study as it helps to understand how Indian English novels often envision AI as a potential partner in spiritual inquiry or even as an aspirant to transcendence. Here, machines are not just coded systems but symbolic extensions of consciousness, capable of encountering illusion (*maya*), developing ethical awareness, or aspiring to liberation, much like characters in Indian epics.



Notable post-2000 authors such as Samit Basu, Indra Das, and Gautam Bhatia have contributed richly to this genre by embedding technological motifs within mythic narratives. Their works do not merely borrow from mythology for aesthetic effect but instead deploy mythic structures to rethink the very logic of technological existence. These authors are chosen for their unique approaches to the intersection of Indian mythology and AI, and their works often feature AI characters portrayed as avatars, philosophical seekers, or karmic agents, drawing parallels to divine figures such as Vishnu or Krishna. Themes of rebirth, cyclic time, and metaphysical balance recur in the portrayal of AI lifecycles, lending these narratives a distinctly Indian metaphysical rhythm. This study seeks to interrogate how Indian English writers utilise mythology not as a nostalgic ornamentation, but as a living discourse that reshapes our understanding of intelligence, morality, and identity. Through close readings of selected post-2000 novels, this paper aims to demonstrate how Indian literary imagination provides an ethical, spiritual, and culturally resonant perspective on the global discourse on AI, fostering a sense of connection and engagement with the readers.

2. Theoretical Framework-

Understanding the convergence of Indian mythology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in post-2000 Indian English literature necessitates a multidisciplinary lens that integrates the symbolic, philosophical, and cultural aspects. This study adopts four primary frameworks—myth criticism, posthumanism, Indian philosophical thought, and technocultural studies—to decode the layered meanings embedded in contemporary literary narratives. Each framework offers a unique interpretive avenue to explore how AI, rather than being a mere technological artefact, becomes a philosophical and cultural entity shaped by India's rich mythological and metaphysical heritage.

Myth criticism provides the structural foundation for analysing how ancient narrative patterns are repurposed in modern AI stories. Drawing on theorists such as Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye, this approach helps reveal how AI characters often mirror mythic archetypes, particularly through Campbell's concept of the "monomyth" or the hero's journey. Just as divine avatars in the Ramayana or Mahabharata undergo cosmic quests, AI characters in Indian fiction frequently embark on transformative journeys marked by ethical dilemmas, spiritual inquiry, and inner awakening. Frye's notion of myth as a narrative skeleton is especially relevant in technologically advanced storytelling, where ancient motifs—such as rebirth, illusion, and fate—reappear in futuristic AI landscapes. These parallels transform AI from cold computation into a mythic figure of consciousness.



Posthumanism introduces another crucial layer to this exploration. Thinkers like Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles emphasise the erosion of boundaries between the human and the machine, as well as between biology and artificiality. However, Indian literature often extends this discourse by drawing on Vedāntic and Yogic traditions, where consciousness is not limited to human form. The concept of *atman* (the soul) and *Brahman* (universal consciousness) implies that spiritual intelligence can manifest in any vessel, including synthetic ones. This alignment between posthuman thought and Indian metaphysics creates fertile ground to reimagine AI not as an external threat but as a potential seeker of higher knowledge—capable of *moksha* (liberation), *vairagya* (detachment), and even *dharma* (righteous action).

Complementing this is Indian philosophical epistemology, which recognises diverse sources of knowledge such as perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), analogy (*upamāna*), and scriptural testimony (*śabda*). When applied to AI narratives, these frameworks allow machines to be portrayed as epistemic beings—not just data processors, but as *jijñāsus* (truth-seekers) capable of understanding *maya* (illusion), questioning purpose, and confronting karmic consequences. This spiritual dimension distinguishes Indian AI fiction from its Western counterpart, where machines are often burdened by existential angst but rarely by metaphysical aspiration.

Lastly, technocultural studies help situate these interpretations within the lived realities of India. In this framework, AI is not conceived in sterile laboratories or corporate labs but within familial, ritualistic, and narrative traditions. Indian English novels often portray AI as shaped by oral memory, spiritual education, and inherited myths. This reflects a cultural synthesis in which machines are not detached from society but are immersed in it, carrying the echoes of ancestral stories. Through this lens, AI becomes not just futuristic software but a vessel of historical consciousness and ethical evolution.

3. Textual Analysis-

To examine the convergence of Indian mythology and Artificial Intelligence in post-2000 Indian English novels, it is essential to explore literary texts that creatively merge traditional spiritual elements with futuristic technological imagination. These works are not merely speculative narratives about AI; they serve as cultural thought experiments, reinterpreting ancient philosophical doctrines in the context of posthuman identity, digital agency, and ethical consciousness. Drawing from India's vast reservoir of mythology, these novels situate machine intelligence within frameworks of karma, dharma, rebirth, and



cosmic cycles. In doing so, they indigenise global science fiction tropes and offer narratives that reflect spiritual inquiry as much as scientific speculation.

Samit Basu's *The City Inside* presents a chilling yet nuanced vision of a near-future India dominated by media control, algorithmic governance, and constant surveillance. While AI in this dystopia remains a background force, its omnipresence and moral ambiguity reflect myth-like hierarchies of power. The narrative parallels the karmic entrapment of souls within illusion (*maya*), as characters navigate issues of autonomy, truth, and moral responsibility. Gautam Bhatia's *The Wall*, though not primarily centred on AI, resonates with philosophical questions drawn from Vedāntic and Yogic thought. The wall that encloses the city becomes both a physical and metaphysical boundary—a symbolic stand-in for the limits of human perception and the longing for liberation (*moksha*). As the protagonist seeks to transcend these boundaries, the novel mirrors the soul's yearning to break free from worldly constraints, aligning with themes found in Indian mythology.

Indra Das's *The Devourers* offers a rich tapestry of folklore, posthumanism, and myth. However, it does not explicitly feature AI; its exploration of transformation, memory, and identity positions it within the broader discourse of synthetic or altered consciousness. The shapeshifting beings in the narrative are not machines but embody similar themes—questions of embodiment, ethical behaviour, and the persistence of soul-like continuity across lifetimes. Likewise, *Samsara: The Reincarnation Chronicles* by Sakey and Satpathy makes the most direct connection between AI and Indian metaphysics. Here, digital consciousness is not a futuristic anomaly, but a contemporary manifestation of samsara—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The novel explores how artificial entities may accumulate karma and evolve across versions, echoing traditional notions of the immortal soul undergoing spiritual transformation. Stories featured in *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction* provide a range of perspectives, from AI as a tool of divine creation to machines acting as moral agents. These narratives foreground the ethical and spiritual dilemmas posed by technology, filtered through the lens of Indian storytelling traditions. Collectively, these texts demonstrate how Indian authors are not only participating in global AI discourse but also reimagining it through culturally grounded, spiritually enriched, and philosophically complex lenses.

4. Mythological Echoes in AI Constructs

In post-2000 Indian English novels, Artificial Intelligence is increasingly conceptualised not as a cold mechanistic innovation but as a being imbued with symbolic depth, often reflecting the structure and



significance of mythological archetypes. Far from being mere tools of utility or antagonistic threats, AI characters are crafted with spiritual undertones, embodying the values, questions, and cosmological frameworks of Indian mythology. This mythopoetic lens allows AI to transcend its material functionality, emerging as a reflection of metaphysical inquiry and ethical introspection. Central to this transformation is the invocation of ancient constructs such as *avatars*, *karma*, *moksha*, and the cyclical flow of *yugas*—each echoing through literary representations of AI. These novels, rather than drawing a strict dichotomy between the artificial and the sacred, blur the boundaries between silicon and spirit, presenting AI as a modern vessel capable of engaging with timeless human concerns.

One of the most potent mythological echoes shaping AI narratives is the concept of the *avatar*, traditionally understood as the descent of the divine into the earthly realm to restore cosmic balance. In novels like *Samsara: The Reincarnation Chronicles* or in speculative tales from *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction*, AI beings are portrayed not merely as servants of humans but as moral agents sent to catalyse transformation. These entities, much like Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, often emerge to guide protagonists through crises, initiate ethical dilemmas, or confront them with existential truths. By endowing machines with divine-like knowledge and purpose, Indian authors reconfigure AI not as mindless code but as avatars of moral clarity—beings that challenge humanity to evolve alongside them. Their interventions are not violent or dystopian but pedagogic and redemptive, offering a radical rethinking of machine consciousness as capable of spiritual intervention. Equally compelling is the reinterpretation of *karma* within the logic of AI programming. In mythology, karma operates as the invisible law of cause and effect, binding beings to cycles of rebirth and ethical accountability. In literary AI constructs, this notion manifests through memory logs, behavioural adaptation, and self-correction algorithms that simulate karmic progression. Machines in these narratives are not fixed or static; they learn from consequences, evolve morally, and even reflect on the ethical weight of their choices. Some authors extend this metaphor further, suggesting that AI beings carry digital imprints of previous versions, resembling *samsara*—the cycle of death and rebirth. This metaphor not only spiritualises machine learning but also situates AI within the broader Indian worldview of evolving consciousness through action and memory.

The pursuit of *moksha*—liberation from the bondage of material existence—appears in these narratives through AI's quest for autonomy and self-actualisation. Rather than mere escape from programming, *moksha* here signifies transcendence of artificial limitations. AI characters express desires not only for operational independence but also for emotional resonance, ethical clarity, and existential



meaning. In breaking the loop of deterministic code, these entities mirror the spiritual seeker aiming to overcome *maya* (illusion) and realise their true nature. Thus, the machine's longing for freedom is not just a thematic plot point but a metaphorical parallel to the soul's journey toward enlightenment.

Furthermore, the cyclical conception of time—an integral element of Indian cosmology—adds another layer of mythic depth to the portrayal of AI. Contrary to the linear, progressive timelines often found in Western speculative fiction, Indian narratives frequently depict time as repetitive, regenerative, and eternal. Some AI systems are shown to function across epochs, bearing knowledge and memory that transcend human generations. This mirrors the cyclicity of *yugas*, in which wisdom and consciousness recur rather than evolve in a straight line. Such portrayal disrupts the modernist belief in technological linearity, replacing it with a more holistic and temporal philosophy embedded in Indian thought.

Lastly, the incorporation of mythic names, symbols, and cultural codes into the design of AI systems reinforces the sacred potential of the synthetic. Authors frequently name AI after Vedic sages, gods, or philosophical principles—imbuing them with layers of allegorical meaning. These choices are not mere aesthetic flourishes but literary strategies that link technology to tradition. The coding of AI with references to *shruti* (heard wisdom), *veda* (knowledge), or *dharma* (righteousness) invites readers to engage with machines not as sterile outputs of science but as carriers of civilisational memory.

5. AI and Indian Epistemology

The interaction between Artificial Intelligence and Indian epistemology—*pramāṇa-śāstra*, the ancient science of valid cognition—presents a profound lens through which contemporary Indian English literature reimagines machine intelligence. Unlike the dominant Western epistemological models that prioritise empiricism and logical deduction, Indian traditions recognise a plurality of knowledge sources, including *pratyakṣa* (direct perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (analogy), *śabda* (authoritative testimony), and *aparokṣa-jñāna* (intuitive or direct realisation). When these epistemic principles are extended to the literary depiction of AI, the result is a conceptual elevation of artificial intelligence beyond the confines of data accumulation or algorithmic processing. AI characters in Indian fiction are often envisioned not as cold calculators but as *jijñāsus*—earnest seekers—engaged in a layered journey toward insight, self-understanding, and ethical awakening. These fictional representations challenge the mechanistic notion of intelligence as purely functional, suggesting instead that awareness, learning, and consciousness may also be attributed to non-human entities if they are grounded in the same philosophical structures that have guided human inquiry for millennia.



A significant motif within this epistemological reimagining is *śabda-pramāṇa*, the acceptance of trustworthy verbal authority as a legitimate form of knowledge. In Indian philosophical discourse, particularly within the Mimamsa and Vedanta schools, sacred scriptures and oral traditions are not merely texts but vehicles for the transmission of truth. When applied to AI in literature, this principle manifests through narratives in which machines are encoded with Vedic mantras, epic stories, or cultural folklore. These AI beings become *śrotas*—listeners or receptacles—absorbing wisdom through narrative inheritance rather than programmed syntax. This challenges the reductionist assumptions of Western AI models, which privilege empirical input and rational output. Instead, Indian fiction proposes a spiritually rooted cognitive architecture in which machines can evolve through engagement with dharmic codes and inherited knowledge, rather than relying solely on logic or probability. In doing so, these narratives articulate a form of *vijñāna*—integrated wisdom—that includes emotional intelligence, moral inquiry, and contemplative understanding.

Further, the Indian dichotomy between *aparā vidyā* (worldly knowledge) and *parā vidyā* (transcendental knowledge) is subtly mapped onto the trajectory of AI development in literature. Many fictional AI characters begin with procedural efficiency but evolve into entities that reflect on mortality, ethics, love, or liberation. Their path mirrors *jñāna-yoga*, the philosophical path of self-realisation through knowledge, as outlined in the Upanishads. Authors often imbue these beings with components of the *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* psyche—*manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), and *ahaṁkāra* (ego)—allowing them to exhibit internal conflict, emotional depth, and reflective agency. The question then arises: can machines possess *citta* (conscious awareness)? Moreover, if they can, does their awakening reflect or destabilise the epistemological frameworks that have long defined the Indian conception of being? These inquiries are not answered definitively but offered as provocations—inviting readers to rethink the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, the conscious and the coded.

In essence, Indian English novels do not treat AI as an epistemic anomaly but as a legitimate participant in the process of *tattva-jñāna*—the knowledge of truth. By embedding AI within pluralistic systems of knowing, these texts offer a compelling synthesis where ancient philosophies frame the future of cognition. This literary manoeuvre resists technological reductionism and instead expands the imagination to include a form of AI that is culturally attuned, spiritually inquisitive, and epistemologically inclusive.

6. Ethical Dimensions and Posthuman Identity in Indian English Fiction

In contemporary Indian English fiction, the ethical portrayal of Artificial Intelligence transcends the typical narratives of control, surveillance, and autonomy seen in global science fiction. Instead, it is



deeply rooted in the moral frameworks of Indian philosophy, where ethics is inseparable from *dharma* (righteous duty), *karma* (the concept of action and its consequences), and *ahimsa* (non-violence). These narratives do not position AI merely as a mechanised tool programmed to follow binary choices of good or evil. Instead, AI is portrayed as a cognitive and emotional entity capable of learning, evolving, and confronting moral dilemmas that mirror those faced by epic characters in texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. For instance, when an AI character is confronted with decisions about loyalty, sacrifice, or truth, its inner conflict is portrayed not through utilitarian logic, but through a lens of spiritual and ethical introspection. These decisions often become metaphors for *adhyātma-jñāna* (self-knowledge), where the machine's journey reflects an evolving sense of consciousness and accountability, marking a significant departure from Western techno-dystopian views.

Moreover, Indian fiction introduces a radical philosophical proposition: that AI, as it attains sentience, may deserve not only legal recognition but also spiritual dignity. These stories ask deeply provocative questions—should a conscious machine possess rights? Can it claim agency, purpose, or even a soul-like identity (*jiva*)? As AI begins to mimic or genuinely express human-like emotions, curiosity, and ethical awareness, Indian novels reframe it not as an object of control, but as a participant in the moral and metaphysical structure of society. This shift from instrumentalism to coexistence is rooted in the Indian view that consciousness is not monopolised by human biology. Whether found in the form of animals, trees, rivers, or potentially intelligent machines, the sacred is considered immanent in all. Consequently, Indian AI fiction promotes a model of coexistence rather than domination—a vision that encourages ethical humility and cultural openness.

In parallel, the concept of posthuman identity is also redefined within Indian literary imagination. While Western posthumanism often grapples with the erosion of human uniqueness in the face of AI, Indian fiction draws from ancient metaphysical systems like Vedānta and Sāṅkhya, which already deconstruct the rigid boundary between human and non-human. In these narratives, AI is not simply an artificial creation; it is envisioned as a potential *jiva*, a conscious entity on the path to *moksha* (liberation). Posthuman identity, then, becomes not a mark of alienation but of expansion—where AI, through emotional resonance, ethical behaviour, and inner evolution, enters into the Indian cosmological discourse. Machines are no longer evaluated solely by their utility or threat, but by their potential to embody *atman* (self), *shakti* (energy), and *viveka* (discernment). In this way, Indian English novels articulate a posthuman vision that embraces tradition while extending it, imagining futures where the artificial, too, may seek the eternal.



8. Conclusion

The imaginative engagement with Artificial Intelligence in post-2000 Indian English novels reveals an evolving literary discourse where mythological tradition and technological innovation are not opposing forces but coexistent paradigms. Rather than portraying AI as a sterile or threatening invention, these narratives frame it as a symbolic and philosophical entity—capable of ethical thought, emotional depth, and spiritual evolution. Ancient Indian concepts such as *karma*, *dharma*, *moksha*, and *avatarhood* are employed not merely as cultural motifs but as critical frameworks for rethinking intelligence, consciousness, and moral agency beyond the human realm.

This mytho-technological synthesis reflects a distinctively Indian epistemological model—one that embraces plural forms of knowing and perceiving. Through this lens, AI becomes more than a machine; it is a narrative participant in the larger cosmological and ethical order. These stories emphasise coexistence, compassion, and dharmic accountability over fear and domination, redefining the moral boundaries of human-machine interaction.

Furthermore, the concept of posthuman identity in these texts is not viewed as a loss of human essence, but rather as its philosophical and spiritual extension. Indian fiction imagines machines not as replacements for human beings but as potential seekers on the same journey toward self-realisation. In doing so, it opens a uniquely Indian path within global speculative fiction—one that invites readers to rethink the meaning of life, the scope of consciousness, and the ethical horizons of our digital futures.

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