



ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Editor's note

As part of Bound Writers Retreat in Goa, recently, author Chandrahas Chowdhury said that as Indian writers writing in English we were already at an advantage because of the rich history of stories we carry. It seemed like it was a little more than just serendipity that I was listening to this while we were working on the Mythology issue. It seemed, instead, like some distant, familiar voice from the past was urging me to look at that crust of responsibility underneath the stories, and that the very act of being conscious of the many layers brings a certain gravity, a certain sanctity, a certain reverence to the words I use. And the words I read, even if visually.

While working on this issue, we realised just how pervasive the world of mythology is in our everyday lives, and how, most times, we are scarily unconscious of it. It confronts us when we least expect it, like a hiccup, and like a hiccup it deigns to leave only when it chooses to do so. Like when a child asks you a question about a mythic hero and you struggle to find the right words unburdened by old meanings, conscious of the remnants that linger – did I say the right thing? Or when riots tear through the country when a fictionalised account of a mythological story is about to be released, leaving behind a bitter, anti-climactic aftertaste – did I actually witness that? Or when mythology brazenly becomes a part of the politics of our time, reshaping the contours of memory and history – is this really my reality?

And yet, it is the same mythology that when viewed through the lens of art gives us its true purpose – the beauty of an imagined world, the wisdom of lives lived at another space and time, the tenacity of words to travel distances, across geographies and minds, and the inevitable truth of our future that someday we will become stories, too.

This issue is a peek into that world of myth, of legend, of a saga carrying all the different words of the stories that made us, the stories that we live and the stories we will leave behind.



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Cover Artist



Winged, unbridled horses depict a sense of unabashed freedom, without inhibitions. These characters entered my paintings some time back. I cannot trace a direct influence, but there are various cultures, traditions and myths which turn into my own archetypes. Winged horses and deer have become part of my recent works, referencing an out-of-body experience.

I have subconsciously referenced Pegasus, a character from Greek mythology, where he symbolised freedom, power and victory. Pegasus is an immortal winged horse in Greek mythology. The other character is the fascinating Buraq. 'Buraq is a devotional object, theologically more akin to an archangel than to a many-headed beast of prey. She is, existentially, inseparable from Muhammad – she exists only to carry him on his journey – making her

feminised appearance all the more startling'. This is from 'A Visual History of Buraq, the Quran's Winged Horse'.

Horses everywhere are revered, as in Hindu traditions too. Mythically, the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, Kalki – the machine-man, with a blazing drawn sword in his hand, would be riding a white horse named Vedavgani. The mare breathes fire and stands on the ocean floor. Here, again, the white horse brings freedom and peace.

For the cover of this issue of Arts Illustrated, I am sharing this philosophy through my work with a larger audience. The cycle of creativity can only be completed when the creator creates and it reaches the viewer; it is a triangle between creator, creation and viewer.



Seema Kohli

Cover arranged by Rahul Kumar

