



## **FANTASY-A SUB-GENRE OF SPECULATIVE FICTION: AN OVERVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

Current generation fiction writers of world literature can come under one roof namely Speculative Fiction. Since the earliest days, genre fiction has captured the imagination of some of the well-respected authors of every literary period. Among many genre fictions such as Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Superhero, Children's literature and Adult literature, Fantasy has been playing an indispensable role in both world literature and in Indian English literature. Fantasy particularly is notable as the only form of literature that consistently blurs the boundaries between adult fiction and children's fiction. However, in its broadest sense, Fantasy constitutes works of many writers, artists, filmmakers and musicians from ancient myths, folklores and legends to a number of recent works which encompassed by a wide audience today.

Literary figures of Fantasy fiction commonly take the readers into an alien world by using magical powers and supernatural phenomena. Generally, the central theme of Fantasy fiction writing depends on the magical and supernatural powers of protagonist as well as the anti-protagonist and other major characters. This paper partially elevates the origin of Fantasy, the place in world literature and the way to assimilate into a strange world through various modes of literary vehicles viz. themes, characters, elements from mythology of different regions and religions, varieties of tools and gadgets and etc.,.

**Key words:** Fantasy, Genres, Literature, Speculative fiction, Elements and Themes.





## Introduction

In fiction, Fantasy genre has predominantly become popular as one of the medievalist forms of Speculative fiction. In its broadest sense, Fantasy comprises an 'n' number of works by many writers, artists, filmmakers, and musicians from ancient myths and legends. Fantasy has been considered the co-genre of science fiction and horror fiction of a home term speculative fiction. Fantasy is a genre that naturally features the use of magic or other supernatural phenomena in the plot, setting, and theme.

According to Carl Jung, All the works of men have their origin in creative Fantasy. In general, fiction genres could be something that might be contained not realistic but imagined as well as unexplained such as magical powers, talking animals and so on. Among many, Fantasy is characterized by intricate world-building and is set in a different world which can be in the past or in the present; similarly on the Earth or in an out-of-earth. The Fantasy worlds are populated by mythical (dragons, unicorns, elves, etc.) and paranormal (vampires, werewolves, shifters, etc.) creatures. In one way, it represents impossible (unexplained) and outside the parameters of our known reality and in another way, it contains unrealistic settings and magical gadgets or machines and is often set in a medieval universe or possibly involving mythical beings or supernatural forms as a primary element of the plot, theme, or setting. Magic is almost always a part of Fantasy and to be seen in the settings or in the plot and even be practiced by the characters. Normally, Fantasy series conclude with the defeat of the antagonists. The protagonists often possess a magical ability that helps him/her in triumphing over evils.

Many remarkable authors like Hans Christian Andersen, are known to the world for their Fairy tales. These tales are considered modern Fantasy and have no problem in relating to young children; in fact most adolescents grow up believing in Fantasy. They wish on candles, wait for tooth fairies, talk to their stuffed animals and play with imaginary friends.

## A view on the history of Fantasy

The roots of modern Fantasy have begun just two centuries ago but its precedents have a long and distinguished history. Indeed, Fantasy has the longest and richest literary heritage of all the forms of genre fiction and the habit of Fantasy is to be taken both in the real life situations and characters and in inculcating them into a world where unexpected / unexplainable things happen that has resonated with readers since the earliest days. Though the Fantasy Fiction has a rich history of inspirations for critics to dissect and apply to the modern genre fiction and it is often examined as the modern counterpart to mythology and legends. It is certainly inspired that many people for many generations have believed in myth and legend in an orbited path which dramatically affected their lives, their customs and their cultures.





The very foremost recorded Fantasy fiction works in history were: **Fantasy: the Epic of Gilgamesh**, **Odyssey** by Homer, **The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night** (which featured the first appearances of Sinbad and Aladdin) and countless others were the prototypes upon which modern literature was formed. Besides these many of the most enduring works of popular literary fiction fall within the realm of Fantasy which includes Sir Thomas Mallory's **Le Morte D'Arthur**, Rudyard Kipling's **The Jungle Book** and Sir Walter Scott's **Ivanhoe**.

Once a genre restricted to a few fanatics and literature freaks, it doesn't grow up its features in various ways in future. But the Fantasy genre is different with others because it touches and crosses all the ways with its perpetual characteristics through the bygone ages. For the past few years, Fantasy has become popular as mainstream in a big way consequently the mega-popular Harry Potter series capturing the world's attention for a decade, the Twilight craze, and now the HBO Game of Thrones series that is loud enough to break all TV records.

Before going to delve into further research in Fantasy fiction, we must know the difference between the most fantastic myths, legends and fairy tales and modern Fantasy genre in three respects: at first, modern genre Fantasy postulates a different reality, either a Fantasy world separated from ours, or a hidden Fantasy side of our own world. In addition, the rules, geography, history, etc. of this world tend to be defined, even if they are not described outright. Traditional fantastic tales take place in our world, often in the past or in far off unknown places. It often describes the place or the time with any precision, and saying simply that it had happened long ago and far away. (A modern, rationalized analogue to these stories can be found in the Lost World tales of the 19th and 20th centuries.) The second difference is that the supernatural element in Fantasy is only a fictitious design. In traditional tales, the consideration of supernatural element is to be real which can cross the spectrum from legends (taken as reality) to myths (understood as describing in comprehensive terms) even more in complicated reality but intentionally fictitious literary works. Finally, the fantastic worlds of modern Fantasy in using traditional elements are created by an author or group of authors but the traditional tales with Fantasy elements were never intended to be separate from familiar myths and the local supernatural folklore.

Transitions between the traditional and modern modes of fantastic literature are evident in early Gothic novels, the ghost stories in vogue in the 19th century, and Romantic novels, all of which used extensively traditional fantastic motifs, but subjected them to authors' concepts.

### **A Place in World Literature (Sources of Fantasy)**

Historically, the World has been shown in a different angle in view of Literature. From an antiquity, genre fiction has pictured the imagination of some of the bench marked authors





of every period but there is a great existence of themes and motifs of such literary works between genre fiction of the past and genre fiction of the present which remains a mystery. For present generation, this sort of discussion will be attempted to offer a clear picture of the history of literary works. Especially, the Fantasy genre, in its broadest sense, has been compiling various thoughts by many writers, artists, filmmakers, and musicians, from ancient myths and legends since the worldwide success of J. R. R. Tolkien's **The Lord of the Rings** and related books.

Fantasy genre has many more sources of historical beliefs and stories with the elements of supernatural as well as fantastic which were the elements of literature from its beginning. The history of modern Fantasy literature begins with **The King of the Golden River** (1841) by John Ruskin which influences the Scottish author, George MacDonald whose novel *Phantastes* (1858) is widely considered to be the first Fantasy novel ever written for the adults. The popularity of the genre, Fantasy, in both the novel and the short story form was established by Lord Dunsany and other many popular noteworthy authors including H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling Edgar Rice Burroughs and Abraham Merritt.

### Mark in Indian English Literature

Indian English Literature has been growing up on the stories of Mahabharata, Ramayana, village lore and folk tales since its beginning which are base for amazing tributes to the imaginative powers of Indian authors and storytellers. In view of Fantasy, Indian Literary Figures have their own constraints which are different one to another but the dependence on imagination and the happy coexistence of both Metaphor and Literalism are some of their common points.

So, before going to view the Fantasy fiction in English Literature from India, we shall have to bind the fact that magic realism is a dominant mode of literary fiction which has been employed with the thematic and the stylistic modes of Fantasy fiction. But, while the former one has been enjoying the prestige of high quality literary fiction and the latter one is usually bunched together with popular genre fiction of its contemporary period. For instance, **Midnight's Children** by Salman Rushdie has been featured with some elements from Eastern epics and myths, in the same way, the literary figures of Fantasy such as Amish Tripathi and their Fantasy novels like **Shiva Trilogy** (The Immortals of Meluha, The secret of the Nagas and **The Oath of the Vayuputras** by Amish Tripathi). **The Great Indian Novel** (1989) by Shashi Tharoor, is a rewritten work of the Mahabharata and Ashok Banker's **Krishna Coriolis** series, here, Ashok Banker who is often also called the Dan Brown of Indian English pulp of Fantasy fiction writing. Eventually, Fantasy fiction is acclaimed the mixer of magic and often unexplainable world of things.





### **A click on some noteworthy Sub-Genres of Fantasy**

Fantasy genre like other genres can't just be labelled or confined by either one theme or one element but is a very wide and ever evolving genre, straddling many different sub-genres at once or even mixing one with other sub and splinter genres of Fantasy. Well populated sub and splinter genres of Fantasy are: Comic Fantasy, Contemporary Fantasy, High / Epic Fantasy, Historical Fantasy, Traditional Fantasy and so.

The nature of Comic Fantasy, a sub-genre, is humorous and satirical through the elements of the tone and the content which would be presented regularly. Comic Fantasy is sometimes referred to low Fantasy or it stands on the opposite spectrum of high Fantasy. Terry Pratchett and Christopher Moore are Well-known comic Fantasy writers.

The present World of Fantasy is heeded as contemporary or modern Fantasy which sets in the real world in drawing the traditional European Fantasy tropes by adapting multicultural mythologies to drive its narration. Most probably, Urban Fantasy falls under contemporary Fantasy but the tremendous popularity of Urban Fantasy demands to separate it from them as a sub-genre. A well-known contemporary Fantasy writer is Neil Gaiman.

The secondary World is set on High / Epic Fantasy with complex and sweeping plots. The narration of which involves world building, warfare, the rise and the fall of kingdoms and much larger cast of characters than traditional Fantasy. Fantasy writers loyally opine that Medieval Europe is the right choice to set the plots of high Fantasy. A series named A Song of Fire and Ice by George R.R. Martin has gained popularity with a tendency towards the dark and gritty and Prince of Thorns by Mark Lawrence celebrated the tendency of Fantasy. Robert Jordan and J.R.R. Tolkien are stalwart authors of High Fantasy.

The novels of Historical Fantasy have been set in a recognizable historical era of the real world before Twentieth Century. In general, Historical Fantasy and High Fantasy share many characteristic features of real historical figures. Most popular Historical Fantasy writers include Marion Zimmer Bradley and Guy Gavriel Kay.

The most significant sub-genre in Fantasy is Traditional Fantasy which is smaller in scope than that of High Fantasy towards magic and plot. The narration usually revolves around a single person or a small group of characters with a clearly defined objective. Anne Bishop and David Gemmell are well noted writers of Traditional Fantasy.

Eventually, these kinds of genres of Fantasy are vary from one to another but each and every one is postured itself as unique one to present its unusual characteristic features in different ways of elements viz., theme, plot, characters, tools/gadgets, and magic etc.





### **Role of various Elements**

The mere element of the Fantasy genre is plot construction with the inclusion of magic and other supernatural phenomena in which theme and setting play a key role for the good progress of any literary work of Fantasy fiction. But the imaginary world, where magic and magical creatures are common, is the major element of many works within the Fantasy fiction genre.

The most signified traits of Fantasy are the inclusion of fantastic elements in a self-coherent (internally consistent) setting where inspiration from Mythology and Folklore remains a constant theme. Within such a construction of Fantasy work, any location of the fantastical element is possible which may be hidden in or leaked into the real world setting where as the characters of such a work are essentially customized into a world with such elements that are stated as parts of imaginary world. Eventually, Fantasy follows rules of its own making, allowing magic and other fantastic devices to be used and still be integrally united together.

### **Conclusion**

Both at present and in future, the Fantasy genre in the sense of world literature is one of the best and an ever growing fictional element with alien subgenres which form every year in a different way at the same time old ones also being updated, combined, and mashed with other genres. Once a genre is restricted with a few Tolkien fanatics and literature freaks, Fantasy has become a mainstream in a huge way in the name of speculative fiction. For instance, the mega-popular Harry Potter series has captured the world's attention for a decade, whereas the Twilight craze and the HBO Game of Thrones series have been being shattered records all TV channels.

Since the beginning world Literature, Myth and legend have been playing an important role to take part in Indian as well as world culture of speculative fiction especially Fantasy fiction genre. In fact, Fantasy has opened its door to experiencing the world of magic and exploring the nature of unexplained as well as imagined thoughts of fiction writers. Fantasy usually has been describing the stories which come from the imaginative powers of authors that could not happen in real life of real world. Hence, Fairy tales as considered by known authors like Hans Christian Andersen, are mentioned as modern Fantasy in recent years of literary fiction genres. And even in relating to young children as well as to adolescents, the Fantasy genre has been playing very prominent role to get entertained with candles, tooth fairies, talk to their stuffed animals and play with imaginary friends. The Fantasy genre as a whole is still growing with new subgenres forming every few years and old ones updated, combined, and mashed in with other genres.





Though the Fantasy has its own prominence in world literature, in the works of science fiction, Fantasy has been playing a partial role for a few decades. For instance, Star Wars, in which the Fantasy elements particularly **The Force** (an unexplained), occupied the leading role in the science fiction genre. So both these genres are interlinked each other not only in the way of readerships' tendencies to overlap and in the authors' tendencies to blur the lines between them but also in the projection of theme and motif.

Eventually, Fantasy retains an image of literary inconsequence but is notable as the only form of literature that consistently makes the boundaries between adult fiction and children's fiction. Fantasy has enjoyed an upswing in popularity, for its popularity, the primary reason is an unexpected critical and popular success of **The Lord of the Rings** series of films and is based upon the novels of J. R. R. Tolkien. The works of Tolkien once were the territory of the geeks but the immense popularity of the films has made it socially acceptable to delve into Fantasy for the first time in the modern era.

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