Dispelling the Diversity Myth: Analysis of the Publishing Industry in India

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Abstract. Unprecedented rise in the popularity of mythology in Indian commercial fiction was accompanied by impressive growth in the publishing industry and a number of significant mergers and acquisitions in the sector. The said events signal towards a possibility of concentration or conglomeration as a result of free market capitalism, which may have a positive or negative impact on the diversity of the content, as per the different theories of political economy of media. Diversity of content was assessed by analysing 10 popular mythology titles and understanding consumer perception of diversity through a survey of 65 readers. Further, interviews with various industry experts and 12 bookstores were carried out to understand the ownership structure of the publishing industry as well as diversity of content. The data was collected from October 2019 until January 2020, spanning a total of four months. The research showed that the publishing industry displayed signs of concentration with a few major players largely controlling the landscape of Indian publishing, by holding a major market share which makes the sustenance of smaller players difficult. Content analysis of popular books in the genre of mythology revealed a lack of diversity in gender, geography, religion and caste through trends like token feminism, underrepresentation of South and Northeast India, religions other than Hinduism and disadvantaged castes. Ownership in the publishing industry was found to significantly impact the diversity, flow and type of content produced. Furthermore, the lack of diversity due to concentration of ownership pointed towards the possibility of a dominant ideology being propagated through the genre of mythology.

Keywords. *Concentration, conglomeration, diversity, ideology, mythology, publishing industry*

Introduction

The endless resurfacing of the myth of Oedipus in modern literature illustrates the gravity of the impact that myths have on the psychology of a civilisation. While modern stories may not always acknowledge the ancient myths that seem to inspire them, at least subconsciously, the parallels between the same are hard to miss (Workman, 1981). It is even harder to miss the similarity between mythical stories of different ethnic and geographical origin, for example the concept of trinity which is notable in both Greek and Hindu mythology.

The feature of comparability across mythologies is used to establish the primacy of myths by virtue of being inspired by some universal truths that we are yet to uncover (Farrand, 1904). Such is the belief in the prominence of mythology, that it has been attempted to correlate the resurgence of traditional myths with the economic and cultural maturity of a country (Sinha, Fernandes, 2013). Hindu mythology is unique in the sense that it acknowledges both the householder and hermit way of life. It goes beyond notions of right and wrong to explore areas of deeper, more grey conflicts. Removal of the western framework of right/wrong from Hindu mythology has given rise to a goldmine for publishing these stories in reinterpreted forms and alternate narratives (Pattanaik, 2003).

Mythology has gained unprecedented popularity in Indian commercial fiction after the landmark success of "The Shiva Trilogy" by Amish Tripathi in 2010. The Book sold over 2.75 million copies which led to a surge in the production of mythological content in the industry (Pandey, 2017). It was followed by Amish Tripathi and other authors rooted in mythology creeping their way into various best selling lists (Thapliyal, 2018).

As per Nielsen India Book market report 2015 this sector is valued at 6.76 billion and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 19.3% over the next five years (Mulmi, 2017). The merger of Penguin and Random house and the acquisition of Harlequin by HarperCollins suggests a possible trend of conglomeration in the industry since these occupy a prominent share in the market (Greenfield, 2014).

The innate moral responsibility of a publishing house is to perpetuate books as cultural objects, which may not necessarily align with the goal of profit making for a sustainable business (Greco, 2007). Even if the moral and business motive were to be reconciled, its internal functioning reeks of nepotism and bias (Altbach, 1975).

The issue is that publishing houses form the basis of the intellectual system and improper outcomes of the industry will lead to inequality of opportunity to get published and propagation of the status quo (Ibid). Research in the field of political economy of media, in the United States, has established lack of diversity of content due to concentration of ownership in the context of radio broadcasting and Hollywood movies (McChesney, 2008; Stoltzfus, 2014). Studies on the media industry in India, such as the analysis of the newspaper industry in India, are scarce and the area of study is generally underexplored (Nair, 2003).

The growing trend of mythology coupled with growth in the publishing industry, warrants an analysis of the ownership structure of the industry and its ramification on content produced and ideology propagated (if any). Therefore, the requirement is to assess the likelihood of economic organisation hampering pluralism in content and economic power being exploited for political agenda.

Research question

Using data from primary and secondary research, this paper answers the question: Has the conglomeration/concentration (or its absence) in the publishing industry affected the diversity of content and led to propagation of a particular ideology for the genre of mythology?"

Material and method

Industry conglomeration and concentration

There are broadly two types of conglomeration observable in an industry, vertical and horizontal (Jacoby, 1970). Concentration across different levels of the industry, such as production, distribution and exhibition is called vertical conglomeration whereas concentration at the level of either production, distribution or exhibition would lead to horizontal conglomeration (Ibid). The number of firms in an industry, the labor productivity and the level of technology all have a significant impact on conglomeration (Wandel, 2010).

Antitrust authorities do not pay much attention to vertical mergers and such vertical integration of ownership tends to negatively impact profitability because the firms are unable to reap differential advantages (Bhuyan, 2002). Horizontal mergers contribute more to industry conglomeration and tend to determine the long run structure of the industry (Gowrikrishna, 1999). The main issue with conglomerates is the reciprocity and subsidisation effect which allows loss making departments to function on the back of profitably departments leading to misallocation of resources in an economy (Stelzer, 1970).

Mergers in publishing

The market for commercial book publishing in India appears to be dominated by global players like Penguin Random House and Harper Collins, and almost no publishing house based in India seems to surface in the market as a considerable market force. However, there is no empirical verification for this claim yet and data for the same is not available in the public domain. From a global perspective, the "big five" publishers were Penguin, Simon and Schuster, Random House, Macmillan and Hachette publishing in particular order, much like the "big four" of the corporate world. The merger of Britain based Penguin Book Publishing and Germany's Random house was initiated in the year 2012, creating the largest publishing house in the world (Economic Times, 2012). The Joint venture generated revenue of 2.5 billion pounds, establishing Penguin Random House as a media giant with access to unprecedented resources, economic power and global influence (Ibid). Penguin Random House now has control of over 250

sub-brands and divisions which as per the company, is a reflection of their commitment to diversity (Penguin Random House, 2014). Following this merger, News Corp which is an international media and information company acquired Harlequin Publishing as an addition to its book publishing house HarperCollins (Crum, 2014).

The acquisition was viewed as an attempt of News Corp, prompted by the Penguin Random House merger, to verticalize its operation in the publishing industry, get bigger in size and create a more international outreach (Greenfield, 2014). In the year 2018, Penguin recorded sales of 4 billion and merged Random House with Crown Publishing, another one of its successful subsidiaries (Alter, 2018). The trend of mergers and acquisitions in the big five of publishing is an indication of a possible increase in concentration of ownership, which may or may not amount to conglomeration for the publishing industry.

Media ownership: Conglomeration and concentration
Concentration in media refers to fewer and fewer people owning media production, distribution or exhibition houses whereas conglomeration refers to expansion of ownership of the same media house, across different forms of media (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006). Despite the theoretical distinction and difference in implication, many researchers tend to use the words concentration and conglomeration interchangeably.

General theories of industrial organisation have been used in media economics to study the structure and performance of media industries under the pretext of the fact that such generalised theories are applicable to media industries with some tailoring, and will result in accurate analysis of concentration or conglomeration (Wirth & Bloch, 1995). The focus has been on studying mergers and acquisitions in the media industry viewing such deals as the key indicators of concentration (Thakurta & Chaturvedi, 2012) . More comprehensive attempts have also been centered around employing economic indicators for example, financial resources and fiscal concerns being utilised to assess concentration (Rudman, 1990).

A 2014 report by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on issues relating to media ownership was directed towards defining ownership and concentration and maintaining diversity of media, mainly in terms of news broadcasting and publishing (TRAI, 2014). Although the report addressed issues of cross media ownership, it was largely ignorant of trends in the book publishing industry in India. The European Union (EU) recently developed a more comprehensive and inclusive framework for regulating media concentration known as the Media Pluralism Monitor which is meant to govern both the normative and functional aspects of media pluralism in the context of EU (Brogi et al., 2018). Given the trend of mergers and acquisitions in the book publishing industry in India, it would be virtuous foresight to develop a similar framework to govern concentration or conglomeration for the same.

Diversity and pluralism in content

The promotion of an informed citizenry by maintaining diversity and pluralism in contents is the social obligation of a country's media industry to ensure democracy and representation (Dutta, 2011). Diversity and pluralism can be divided into the following four spheres which are not strictly mutually exclusive- Diversity in geography for coverage of multiple regions; Diversity of issues to acknowledge various topics and concerns from different fields and genres; Diversity of content to voice different opinions in the society; and Diversity of persons to provide access and representation to different demographics (Hoffmann-Riem, 1987). Pluralism can be broadly divided into normative and functional aspects; Normative pluralism encompasses demographic, cultural and political pluralism whereas functional pluralism covers pluralism in media types, ownership of media and genres (Valcke, 2009).

Impact of ownership on content

Having examined the nature of concentration and conglomeration and the underlying factors determining the presence or absence of diversity and pluralism allows us to ponder the question at the cross road of these phenomena. How does concentration or conglomeration in ownership of media impact the diversity and plurality of content being produced? Literature presents a divided house in response to the question.

The critics of the idea of ownership concentration reducing diversity suggest that media economics has assumed the statement to be true with little empirical verification, and that most studies establishing concentration and lack of diversity fail to create a cause-effect relationship between the two. Format and ideological diversity are said to be promoted by concentration because large media houses cannot survive by producing only one type of content (Gamson & Latteier, 2004). Others argue that mergers and common ownership of media does not necessarily mean reduction in diversity, as different subsidiaries of large conglomerates function with considerable autonomy and even cater to different lingual and racial groups (Vizcarrondo, 2004). An empirical investigation of ownership of media in the USA showed that 4 to 7 top firms control 75% or more of market share in Book publishing, Cable Channels, Cable TV systems, Movie Production, Music Distribution, Newspapers and Radio Stations (Champlin & Knoedler, 2002). The investigation is followed by an illustration of lack of format, genre and demographic diversity in each of these media industries.

Conglomerates use their huge scales to support the creation of commercial content while crowding out creative content, which is allegedly the situation in the US. entertainment industry (Taubman, 1970). Particularly in the comic book industry, conglomeration has led to propagation of status quo ideas such as capitalism and hypermasculinity with no representation of marginalised groups and interests (Stoltzfus, 2014).

No conclusive result can be drawn about the impact of media ownership on the kind of content that is produced, especially in the Indian context. Given the diversity of approaches that literature has adopted, the researchers have analysed various theoretical frameworks like

industry analysis and political economy of media, to arrive at relevant and applicable theories for the purpose of this research.

Theoretical framework

The analysis of the study is done using the political economy of media, in light of the neoclassical framework and the radical political economies of media. Both these frameworks draw upon economic ideas of markets and industries to study media, and its implications on society. The neoclassical theory postulates that increased diversification and fragmentation of media industries has made the marketplace of ideas more competitive than ever (Thierer & Eskelsen, 2008; Compaine, 2010). It postulates that the free marketplace of ideas will lead to the propagation of diverse content, the only concern being the depletion of any common culture in media due to increased fragmentation (Sunstein, 2017). The applicability of this theory, in the context of the publishing industry in India, depends on the extent to which the industry fits the ideal of the free marketplace of ideas.

This is criticised by radical political economies school of thought, which postulates that media industries are not suited to be a commercial enterprise because the laws of capitalism promote media houses to maximize profits of the shareholders, and not to uphold responsibilities like providing a safe platform for wide circulation of pluralist ideas (Curran & Seaton, 2018). McChesney, one of the most prominent theorists of the school, holds that modern capitalism is monopolist in nature, and has commercialised the media industry at the cost of its ethical responsibility to promote an informed citizenry (McChesney 2008).

Publishing industries in India are mostly organised as private enterprises which allows for the analysis of the structure of ownership and diversity of content, with respect to the theoretical framework of radical political economies of media.

Industrial organisation theory postulates a link between the structure of an industry and its performance (Wirth & Bloch, 1995). A number of measures of concentration such as the Herfindahl-Hirschman index (HHI), CR3 and CR4 ratios, top 4 and top 8 firms' analysis, Krugman concentration index and Hoover-Balassa index have been utilised in the context of media industry analysis in the studied literature.

The Herfindahl-Hirschman index is computed by summing the squares of individual market shares of each player in the industry. It is widely used in academia and Telecom Regulatory authority of India has also recommended the use of the HHI to measure concentration in the media segment (Vizcarrondo, 2004; TRAI, 2014). Therefore, the HHI is the index of choice to measure competitiveness of the publishing industry in India.

Previously, studies have either utilised a political economy approach to understand diversity in media through studying content (Stoltzfus, 2014), or taken an empirical road to compute concentration/conglomeration under an industrial organisation framework (Curran & Seaton, 2018). However, the dual nature of the research question which aims to not only assess diversity of content, but also deduce a relationship between ownership and diversity,

necessitates the adoption of both radical political economies of media and industrial organisation theory as a blended framework

Design of the study

Data has been collected from all three tiers of the Publishing industry, namely production, distribution and exhibition because there is potential for content to be altered at these levels. Production refers to publishing houses that print and market selected content from authors for mass consumption. Distribution entails physically transporting content from publishing houses to bookstores, and are not concerned with the diversity of the content they trade. Therefore, information regarding the operation of distribution was collected from publishing houses and bookstores. Exhibition has been conceptualised as book stores because it is the traditional method of consuming books, and it still remains a prominent way of consumption, despite the rise of e-books. The sale of books is used as a proxy variable for readership of books, due to the unavailability of any other indicators that conceptualize readerships.

Level of concentration was revealed by the number of major players and the economic power exercised by them. Conglomeration was studied based on the integration of publishing with other forms of media. The state of legal regulations was revealed by awareness of current legal regulation among the players, and any perceived need for more stringent regulation. Previously, studies have similarly assessed conglomeration and concentration in the industry utilizing various concentration ratios, including the HHI (Compaine, 2010).

Diversity and pluralism of content was studied using both normative parameters like, gender, religion, caste, and functional parameters such as, types of formats used, demography and geography of targeted readers. Primary data collection assessed both market share and functioning of the publishing industry, alongside perception of diversity and political implication of mythology. Responses collected are largely qualitative and consist of both open ended and multiple-choice questions. The structured questionnaire was administered to consumers and within industry professionals using a judgement technique.

Alongside the primary data collection, content analysis of selected texts from the genre of mythology was conducted to assess the degree of diversity of content. A similar method used to assess diversity of the comic book industry in the United States, probed the content across different parameters of representation, revealing a lack in diversity which was ascribed to free market capitalism (Stoltzfus, 2014).

Industry survey

To assess production, personal and telephonic interviews were conducted with a mix of major and minor publishers to capture both the leading and minority view in the industry. The designation of these respondents ranges from executive editors to department managers.

Bookstores were surveyed using both personal and telephonic interviews, in Delhi and Bangalore from October to December and responses indicated that there might be a difference in the operations of major players between the North and South of India.

Table. 1: List of bookstores surveyed

Book Store	Location	Outlets
The Bookmark	South Extension market, Delhi	1
Midland Bookstore	SDA market, Delhi	2
Faqir Chand and Sons	Khan market, Delhi	1
The Bookshop	Jor Bagh, Delhi	1
Piccadily	Connaught place, Delhi	1
Baig Production	Delhi and Mumbai	2
Blossoms Book House	Church Street, Bangalore	2
Gangaram's Book Bureau	MG road, Bangalore	2
BookHive	MG road, Bangalore	1
Bookworm	Church Street, Bangalore	1
Gangaram's Book House	Domlur, Bangalore	1
Sapna Book House	Bangalore	7

Consumption

To understand the orientation of consumers to the genre of mythology and its implications, 65 respondents aged 15 to 35 (indicated by bookstores as the demographic for mythology) were surveyed. The responses from google forms were supplemented by personal interviews from six consumers who were avid readers of mythology and had read at least five or more titles from the genre of mythology. These in-depth interviews regarding consumer perception provided the researcher with insights to understand aggregate data obtained from google form survey during the months of December, 2019 and January, 2020.

Results

The degree of concentration/conglomeration at each level of the publishing industry and the consumer perception of diversity and pluralism in the genre of mythology is probed in the light of the results from the primary survey.

Examining industry concentration/conglomeration
Production

Production is centered in the hands of a few giants in the publishing industry, namely, Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Westland and Rupa, especially with regards to Mythology. The

findings of the primary study confirmed that these are the major publishers in the opinion of the surveyed consumers. Publishing houses exercise power over the content that they sell by way of a filtering process. Each manuscript is put through a check for political correctness and to minimize aspects that may be considered offensive generally (Respondent 1, 2019). Notions of political correctness and what is considered offensive, which may be molded by the political scenario and general sentiment of morality, direct the content which is considered appropriate to sell by the producers.

The review of literature highlighted certain prominent mergers and primary data suggests that the phenomenon is a common sight in the industry. In some cases, publishers partially merge for the disposal of specific activities. Larger publishing houses often market the content of smaller publishers because the latter do not hold the capacity or influence to market their own content. This partial merger or collaborative action can also be viewed as horizontal integration because the larger publishing house exercises power over the content that it markets. The impact and cause of horizontal integration is generally for profitability as per established theory, and the same can be verified as per the data collected. Since the majority of publishers are organised as private limited, financial data such as profitability is not available in the public domain. However, each publisher agreed that profitability (either in the short run or long run) alongside greater market share is the primary reason behind mergers and acquisitions. The profit driven approach of the producers illustrates that the publishing industry is not very different from the traditional firm studied under industry analysis, at least in terms of its motive. Economic forces play an important role in decision making, despite the cultural considerations of the industry. Measures of concentration under competition analysis have been utilised to understand the degree of concentration in the industry.

The respondents of the primary survey estimated the market share of Penguin Random House to be between 50 percent to 75 percent, or they termed penguin as the "largest" or "leading" publisher in India. According to a 2018 article published in The New Republic, Penguin Random House "controls more than half of the traditional literary marketplace according to many estimates". Devdutt Pattanaik, one of the biggest names in the genre of mythology, has published multiple books with Penguin Random House. Therefore, even a conservative estimate of Penguin's market share would be approximately 50 percent.

Utilizing this approximate estimate of Penguin's market share coupled with the framework of the Herfindahl Hirschman Index (HHI), the analysis provides some insight about the degree of concentration in production. Given a market share of 50 percent for a producer, the HHI gains 2500 units for this one producer alone. The general interpretation of the HHI values, that range from 0 to 10,000, is that industries between 0 to 1500 are highly competitive, 1500 to 2500 are relatively less competitive and those with HHI over 2500 are highly concentrated (Valcke, 2009). Hence, production in the publishing industry can be placed on the concentrated end of the competition analysis spectrum

Moreover, the market share of none of the major players has changed substantially in the last decade. Smaller publishing houses enter the market to capture a niche, but soon either lose their market to larger houses or are acquired by or merged with larger publishing houses. Therefore, in all probability, production has remained consistently on the concentrated side.

Distribution

Distribution of books appears to be disconnected with its production. It is not very common to see publishing houses distribute their own books or acquire any distributors for the same purpose. Most producers held that distribution is distinct from publishing, and even perhaps a "much older institution than Indian publishing itself" (Respondent 5, 2020).

An interesting observation from the findings of the primary survey is that every respondent who was questioned about distribution, mentioned that Prakash book distributors is the leading distributor in the industry. Estimates about its market share ranged from 50 percent to as high as 90 percent. Many respondents have alleged that Prakash Books Distributor has the exclusive rights of distribution for Penguin Random house in India. Smaller publishing houses also contract a large portion of their content to Prakash books for distribution. All the bookstores surveyed have termed Prakash books as their main distributor.

Prism books, India book house and International book house have surfaced as minor players in distribution of books in India. However, there is only rare mention of these distributors and they do not seem to have a market share worth consideration. Coupling estimates of Prakash's book share with the HHI index as described in production, gives a view of concentration in distribution of books. Even with a 50 percent share, Prakash books alone accounts for 2500 points on the HHI, which is highly concentrated as mentioned previously.

Exhibition

Exhibition, which is the last leg in the supply chain of publishing, is highly localised and displays no signs of concentration. Each bookstore surveyed had their own market based on their collection of content or the demographics of consumers that they cater to. Even bookstores closely located to each other did not seem to engage in competition with each other.

Despite the presence of multiple branches spread across the country, none of the bookstores have managed to capture a sizable market share. Such franchise-based bookstores, like Sapna bookstore, resort to diversification into products like stationery and gifting. Due to the multiplicity of sellers and close-to-perfect product substitution, it can be inferred that exhibition or bookselling is on the perfectly competitive side of competition analysis.

Consumer perception of diversity

Primary data suggests that most players in the industry find the content to not be sufficiently diverse. Eighty-six percent of respondents held that there is a lack of gender diversity in the genre of mythology. Of these 86 percent, 67 percent believed that there are more male gods than

female gods, only about 32 percent believed that there are more female gods. The remainder held that there is either equal representation or that it is hard to ascertain who is given more representation. Publishers are largely of the opinion that women are being given increasingly more representation in mythology.

Figure 1. Consumer perception of diversity of content
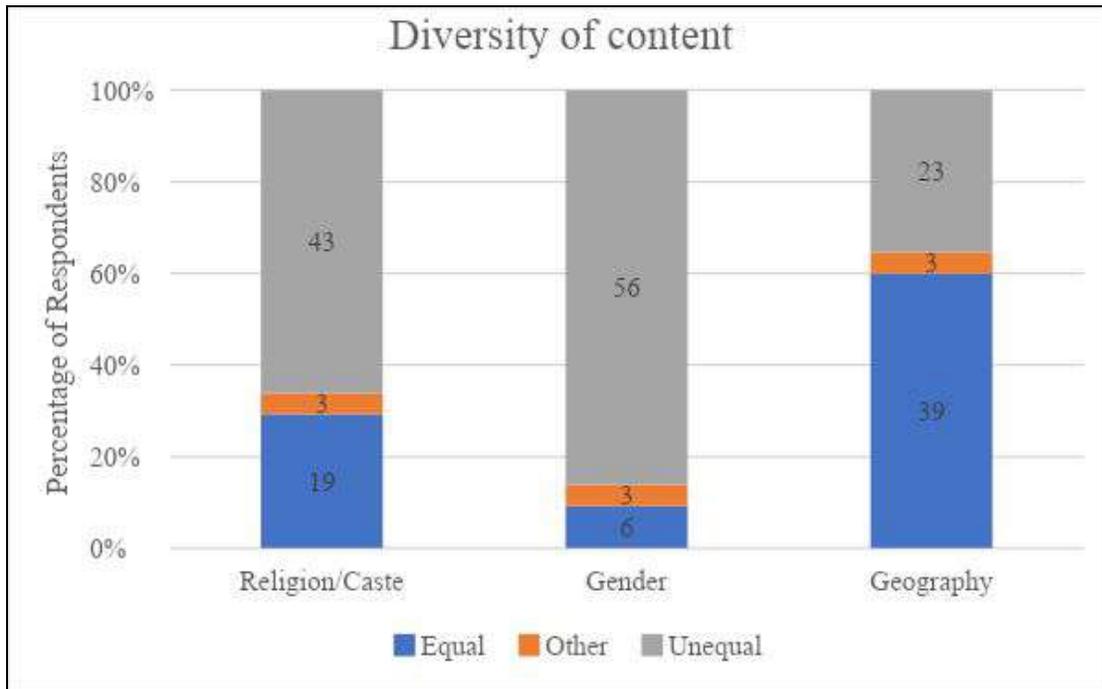
With regard to religion and caste, approximately 67 percent of consumer respondents believed that there is a bias in representation with more weightage being given to a certain religion/caste. Of these respondents, around 65 percent believed that Hinduism is given more representation in mythological texts, and the other 35 percent believed that such representation is reserved only for upper caste Hindus. Consumers even alleged that most of the mythology is directed at "unabashedly glorifying Hindu Kshatriyas and Brahmins and treating others as outcasts and demons". There is a lack of stories that speak of the lives of other castes like Vaishyas and Shudras. Sixty percent of the respondents were of the opinion that no specific geographic area or region had greater representation in the genre of mythology. The 35% of consumers that ascertained unequal representation, felt that there is more weightage given to some areas, mostly Northern and Western regions of India.

Discussion

To answer the research question about whether or not concentration of media ownership adversely affects diversity of content, the paper will first establish that there is strong likelihood

of industry concentration/conglomeration in the publishing sector. This is followed by a content analysis of the top-selling, commercially successful books examining the degree of diversity in the genre of mythology. The last section suggests a possible causal link between concentration and lack of diversity, and its impact on the ideology of the society.

Ownership structure

The market domination of a few major players, the short-lived emergence of minor players and guidelines of selected concentration index point towards the possibility of existence of concentration, in the context of production in the Indian publishing industry. Distribution also witnesses a similar scenario with one major player capturing a large portion of the market share, indicating concentration. Exhibition remains geographically scattered and displays signs of a competitive industry.

Publishing firms do not appear to be branching out to other forms of media and hence the discussion has focused on concentration rather than conglomeration. However, these two scenarios are not mutually exclusive because the publishing houses are owned by conglomerates. Penguin Random House and HarperCollins are both owned by international media conglomerates namely Bertelsmann and NewsCorp respectively. Westland has been acquired by Amazon which is a diversified conglomerate. Therefore, the implications of both conglomeration and concentration continue to be relevant for the analysis.

Degree of diversity and pluralism

The textual analysis has been conducted based on the mentioned reading of 10 titles spanning 14 books. These readings have been selected based on the researcher's perception of their popularity and with a view to include all the prevalent forms of contemporary mythology in circulation. Collectively, the listed books have sold over 5 million copies and most of these have been on various best seller lists such as Crossword and Amazon (Radhakrishna, 2013). The selected authors are also widely regarded as the most prominent authors in the genre (Thapliyal, 2018). Moreover, the texts have been selected to include content published by all the major publishers as mentioned in the previous section, as well as smaller publishers such as Rupa Books and Leadstart. It may be noted that special attention and reference is given to The Shiva trilogy and Ram Chandra Series, because the titles have sold the most copies by any Indian author and have been termed as "the fastest selling book series in the history of Indian publishing" (Hindustan Times, 2018).

The books date from 2010, which can be viewed to mark the beginning of mythology's popularity, to 2019. The attempt is to cover various forms, publishers and authors throughout the time period. Such textual analysis coupled with results of the primary survey has been utilised to determine the degree of diversity of content in the genre of mythology.

Table. 2: Details of texts selected for content analysis

Book/Series Title	No. of Books	Author
Shiva trilogy	3	Amish Tripathi
Ram Chandra series	3	Amish Tripathi
Palace of illusions	1	Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
Forest of Enchantments	1	Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
Asura	1	Anand Neelakantan
Vanara	1	Anand Neelakantan
Sita's Sister	1	Kavita Kane
Karna's wife	1	Kavita Kane
My Gita	1	Devdutt Patnaik
The Pregnant King	1	Devdutt Patnaik

Types of contemporary mythology

There are broadly two forms of narrating mythology that have become prevalent in the past decade. The first being the alternate retellings of the classical epics such as Mahabharata and Ramayana from the lens of an otherwise minor or antagonist character. The second format that is prevalent is the modern retelling of epics which either minimizes or eliminates magical elements from the story which are often replaced by prehistoric science

Examples of texts written in the first format are Karna's wife and Sita's sister by Kavita Kane, Asura and Vanara by Anand Neelakantan, Palace of illusions and Forest of Enchantments by Chitra Banerjee and so on.

To explain the first format, consider the epic of Ramayana. In the traditional version, Ramayana is the story of a law-abiding and upholding king, Ram of Ajodhya who is married to a devoted wife, Sita of Mithilla. Ram and Sita, along with Ram's step brother Lakshman are sent to the forest for a 14-year long exile, on the orders of their deceased father, Dashrath. During the exile, Sita is kidnapped by the demon king Ravana, who is portrayed as a fierce and evil ruler. Ram undertakes the siege of Lanka, with the help of an army of monkeys, to rescue Sita. Hanuman, an integral soldier in the army, is unconditionally devoted to Ram and is paramount in the success of his siege. The story is centered around Ram's valor and resolution to uphold justice, and is generally narrated from his perspective.

The Forest of Enchantments by Chitra Banerjee brings out Sita's plight of being victimised and robbed of her individual identity through the course of the epic. It brings out Sita's rather silent suffering of watching the citizens of their kingdom applaud Ram for upholding justice, while he is unfair towards her in their marital relationship. Sita is made to undergo a literal trial by fire, which she passes because she has been faithful to Ram, but he is not subjected to any such tests. Despite conceding to and passing the shameful trial by fire,

there is gossip about her unfaithfulness in the kingdom. Ram dispenses his duty as king to uphold justice by banishing Sita rather discreetly, ordering Lakshman to guide her to a hermitage in the forest and asking her to never return.

Vanara by Anand Neelakantan talks about Hanuman's journey of devotion to Ram in his siege of Lanka. It brings out Hanuman's inner conflicts in his attempt to unconditionally support Ram. Asura illustrates Ravana as a grey character, with flaws that are only human. The story is a criticism of the traditional narrative of Ramayana which seeks to demonize Ravana.

The second format often uses mythology as a loose guideline while taking extensive creative liberty with the details of the plot, for example the Shiva trilogy and Ramchandra series by Amish Tripathi and Arjuna by Anuja Chandramouli.

Amish Tripathi was notedly the first author to rationalize the unraveling of traditional mythology using politics and ancient science. Although it cannot be established beyond doubt that Amish Tripathi founded this second format of contemporary mythology, he is definitely the first to popularize it through his series, the Shiva trilogy, which sold an unprecedented 2.75 million copies (Hindustan Times, 2018).

In traditional Hindu mythology, Somras is a magical potion which bestows immortality on the Gods who consume it. In the Shiva trilogy, Somras is transformed into a scientifically crafted medicinal potion which prolongs the life of the elite class in the society that has access to it. The potion is synonymous to modern day medicines, because it has side effects like most allopathy drugs (Tripathi, 2013, pp. 11-21). Further, Nagas who are mystical creatures of distinctive humanoid forms are dubbed as humans with birth deformities at the margins of the society. The narrative seeks to eliminate or minimize mystical elements to suit the framework of modern readers. Devdutt Pattanaik, who is one of the most popular authors of the genre, cannot be classified loosely into either of the two categories because he does not fictionalize mythology. While Pattanaik has distinguished himself from the remainder of mythology fiction writers, he has not been able to purge the western framework from his texts. For example, Deha and Dehi are Hindu concepts of being that are hard to grasp and much space in the Gita is devoted to merely explaining these. My Gita compares these concepts to western ideas of body and soul. While the comparison aids modern readers, it does not nearly capture the essence and depth of the ancient concepts of Deha and Dehi (Pattanaik, 2015, pp. 67-78).

Format diversity

The first format, in the wave of new mythology content, is identified as alternate retellings of myths using the lens of otherwise minor characters. The second format is the exercise to take creative liberty with mythology, by replacing magical elements with prehistoric science.

While the new take on mythology is fascinating to read, it has become redundant due to extensive use of the format by authors. Primary data does not contribute to the analysis of format diversity because most players in the publishing industry, including publishers, were largely ignorant of the format of narration. The mentioned formats encompass the majority of

mythology being dished out currently, which will further be termed as contemporary mythology. Despite the movement of contemporary mythology in an attempt to rediscover our culture founded in myths, the constraints of the two mentioned formats has limited the attempt to a western framework. It has prevented a pluralist and multiple perspective view with no heroes or villains or damsels in distress, which is better suited to the interpretation of Hindu mythology due to its complexity. Such is the complexity of Hindu mythology that it cannot be strictly classified into any modern perspective of viewing religion such as monotheism, polytheism or henotheism.

Content analysis
Gender
The textual analysis of said books suggests that while many female characters are being assigned the role of protagonists, the remaining characters continue to be largely male. Such a discrepancy suggests that women representation is an important aspect of the first category of contemporary mythology, but the authors often fail to reinterpret the entire narrative to ensure equality. Considering the example of the Palace of illusions, Draupadi's narrative of the Mahabharata gives voice to her character over formerly important male characters like the Pandavas or Kauravas. The traditional version of the Mahabharata is an epic battle of armies and political strategies, between the Pandavas and Kauravas, two groups of step brothers fighting for a kingdom each believes is righteously their own. The story hinges on Draupadi's humiliation by Kauravas in court, who is in a polyandrous marriage with the Pandavas. The Pandavas are sent to exile with Draupadi and proceed to plot their revenge and regain their kingdom from the Kauravas. Although the Palace of Illusions is narrated from Draupadi's perspective, the rest of the story remains male centric. Draupadi's childhood is largely narrated in the light of her brother and father, and almost no consideration is diverted to her mother or any other female characters in the story.

At the dawn of the battle between Pandavas and Kauravas, Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, reveals to Karna, one of the main warriors of the Kaurava camp, that he is her biological son and he was previously misinformed about his ancestry. It is an attempt by Kunti to win Karna's allegiance for the Pandava camp. The author goes on to explore the conflicts that Karna faces and Draupadi's musing of ramifications of the incident. Kunti's struggle to contribute to her sons' victory and preservation is not explored (Divakaruni, 2008, pp. 241-244).

The secret of Karna's birth was a bone that Kunti had buried and guarded all her life, because he was born to her through a boon and would have been considered illegitimate in her marital relationship. Kunti's devastation and desperation in the situation is just one example of the ignorance towards gauging the struggles and perspectives of other female characters.

The example is illustrative of the token feminism that is being practiced in the narratives which are often termed as feminist.

Religion/Caste

Firstly, none of the studied texts are centered around the lives or stories of Vaishyas and Shudras. Of the 14 selected texts, only the Pregnant King by Devdutt Patnaik elaborates on the lives of two characters from the lower caste, Somvat and Sumedha. However, the story is centered around the Kshatriya King Yuvanshva and his mother Shilavati, and the story of the lower castes is only a part of this larger plot (Pattanaik, 2008).

Secondly, their perspective in the narrative of epics is also not expanded upon. For example, in the Forest of Enchantments, Ram is pressured to exile Sita because of rumors of her socially unacceptable conduct among the citizenry. However, we do not hear the views and opinions of these people, beyond this surface commentary (Divakaruni, 2019, pp. 312-317).

Geography

Although most respondents of the primary survey feel that there is no discrepancy in geographic representation, the textual analysis suggests otherwise. Stories are often centered around Northern and Central India and rarely feature South or Northeast regions of India. Moreover, the mere representation of multiple geographic regions is not sufficient to establish geographic diversity. There is a lack of stories that are centric and indigenous to these scarcely featured regions. Of the selected texts, Ram Chandra series, Palace of illusions, Forest of Enchantments, Asura, Vanara, Sita's Sister and Karna's wife are based upon the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The mentioned epics predominantly glorify kingdoms of Ayodhya and Hastinapur in Northern India, and this is not altered or touched upon in selected texts. The Pregnant king is set in the ancient city of Vallabhi which is located in the vicinity of present-day Gujrat. The Shiva trilogy by Amish Tripathi is the only exception to this pattern as the series progresses from Meluha in the North West of ancient India, to Swadeep in Northeast and to the Dandak forest in the South.

Aggregate diversity and pluralism

To summarize the results of the analysis there is a lack of format diversity in contemporary mythology despite the pluralism in narratives, insincere inclusion of women and inadequate representation of disadvantaged castes and certain geographic areas.

The analysis confirms the prevalence of selective exposure in the context of mythology publishing in India. The theory of cognitive dissonance, proposed by Leon Festinger in 1975, states that "inconsistent cognitions produce unpleasant states that motivate individuals to change one or more cognitions to restore consistency with other cognitions" (Harmon-Jones, 2012). Festinger notes that to minimize cognitive dissonance, people are more likely to come in contact with and consume information that does not oppose their preconceived notions and beliefs, which constitutes the crux of the selective exposure theory (ibid.).

In the context of contemporary mythology, these notions relate to gender, geography, caste and format. Token feminist content is commercially successful, because it appears that

people want to hear the rise of feminist narratives without having to give consideration to all female characters or exploring the depths of their experience and psyche. Stories from Northern parts of the country sell better because the glorified history of this region is reinforced through myths. Perspectives of marginalised casts are ignored because it interferes with preconceived notions of Hindu mythology being diverse and inclusive. Readers have accepted the mentioned two formats of mythology, and any text which chooses a different narrative disrupts the consumers' western framework of looking at mythology.

Causal relationship and implications

Establishing concentration of ownership and lack in diversity of content lends us a view of the scenario in the publishing industry. However, the researcher is yet to explore how ownership, and specifically its concentration, hampers the creative process of making and circulating content. Understanding the interplay of ownership and content, helps to strengthen the causal relationship between concentration and lack in diversity. The following section examines this interplay alongside its implications for the society.

Impact of ownership on the flow of content

The notable growth in the publishing industry has already been ascertained which should have attracted new players and greater diversity of content. Most respondents of the primary survey suggest that while the number of imprints might have increased, ownership has remained unchanged or constant. The concentration of ownership in publishing has caused the number of players to be static despite unprecedented growth.

A publishing industry can be called efficient according to the neoclassical framework, if there is a free marketplace of ideas i.e. anyone who wants to be published has the opportunity to do so. On a scale 1 to 10, 1 being fairly easy and 10 being very rare, all the respondents rated the difficulty of getting a rookie writer getting published at 5. The same respondents also felt that it is important for a publishing industry to entertain amateur writers, to keep young ideas flowing through the content. In 2019, Panther's Paw Publication was set by a writer to provide a platform for stories of marginalised sections, because he had failed in his attempt to publish Dalit writings through mainstream publishing houses (James, 2020). The example is illustrative of the difficulty which upcoming authors face in the course of getting published, especially if their content is diverse as per the present standards of the publishing industry.

The findings of the primary study on ease of getting publishing can be verified using the insights from the content analysis. The history of book publishing of the five authors selected for the content analysis was traced. It is evident from the table below that the authors are initially published only by small publishing houses, and the length of such initial period is subjective to the author. After the commercial success of their content in the initial period, they are signed by larger publishing houses and remain contracted with them later. The only

exception to this pattern is Amish Tripathi, and his success marks the beginning of major publishing houses printing contemporary mythology for many other authors.

Table. 3: Tracing publications of authors selected for content analysis

Author	Initial period	Initial Publishers	Later period	Later publishers
Devdutt Pattanaik	1997-2006	Feffer & Simons, Bear & Company and Brijbasi Art Press	2006-2019	Penguin Random House, Harper Collins and Westland
Anand Neelakantan	2012-2015	Leadstart	2017-2019	Westland, Penguin Random House
Chitra B. Divakaruni	2008	Picador	2019	Harper Collins
Kavita Kane	2013-2016	Rupa Books	2017-2019	Westland
Amish Tripathi	2010-2013	Westland	2015-2019	Westland

The current landscape of publishing does not fit the ideal of a free marketplace for ideas, due to considerable barriers to entry for both new firms and new authors.

Impact of ownership on the type of content
Primary survey indicates that large publishing houses are of the opinion that the size of the publishing company does not dictate its affinity towards niche and creative content. On the contrary, smaller publishing houses held that their enterprises are more sensitive to creative and bold content, as opposed to larger publishing companies. The fact that authors must establish themselves with a smaller publishing house initially lends credibility to the risk-taking affinity of such firms and their opinion.

The governing authority of a country exercises influence over the commercial enterprises in a country. Seventy-two percent of primary survey respondents agreed that the political scenario of the country impacts its publishing industry. One publisher held that "All publishing takes place in a social and political context so it is impossible to separate politics from publishing (Respondent 5, 2020)". Therefore, if a political party has control of any of the major players, they can considerably impact the ideology of the citizenry.

Therefore, observations indicate that major publishing houses are inclined towards selling books that have a greater probability of achieving commercial success and are in line with the ideology of the political party in power. Books no longer remain a cultural or literary object for intellectual enlightenment, but turn into profit-making and utility-endowing goods.

Impact on diversity of content produced
Over 80 percent of survey respondents held that an increase in concentration of ownership in the publishing industry could lead to less diversity. Respondents from within the publishing

industry did not share their belief. They were of the opinion that the publishing industry is not concentrated or has no scope for concentration, or even if concentration is established it would not affect the diversity of content produced.

There exists a discrepancy in the opinion of within industry respondents. Questions that assess parameters of concentration of ownership and degree of diversity yield results that point towards a high degree of ownership concentration and a lack in the diversity of content produced. However, an explicit question about concentration or diversity leads to within industry respondents taking up a defensive position, refusing concentration of ownership or the lack in diversity of content.

Their disagreement regarding the explicit question of concentration and diversity is indicative of a defensive position for their trade rather than credible opinion of the subject. The position of within-industry respondents confirms the hypothesis of concentration, lack in diversity and helps to establish a causal link between these factors. Having gathered that ownership had an impact on the flow and type of content circulated, the diversity of content is also bound to be affected. It appears that the lack of risk-taking affinity of larger firms could have led to lack in diversity, as illustrated in the content analysis section.

Political economy implications

Findings of the primary survey illustrate the far fetching implications that the genre of mythology has for the society. Myths impact the psyche of its readers according to over 90 percent of respondents, especially in the Indian context because we grow up hearing these stories. All the respondents of the personal interviews claimed to have encountered mythology as children mostly through their families. In their own opinion, these stories have impacted their adult personality and worldview.

It is also noteworthy that consumer perception indicated a rise in the popularity of mythology in the past decade, which may amplify the intensity of impact that myths have on the psyche of its readers. Over 90% respondents of the primary survey agreed that mythology, as a genre, has gained popularity, especially with the advent of contemporary mythology.

The causal relationship between mythological content and people's ideologies coupled with lack in diversity of content due to concentration of ownership, essentially creates an echo-chamber of ideas. The same kind of content is, in all probability, bound to propagate the same kind of ideology. The extreme outcome of such a situation is the creation of a misinformed homogenous obedient citizenry raising no questions against the existing power structures. The primary survey revealed that 86 percent of respondents believe that mythical beliefs manifest in the political and cultural outlook of individuals. Over 90 percent of respondents held that political parties might use mythology to their advantage.

The theory of dominant ideology, initially proposed by Marx and Engels, states that the ruling class furthers its interests by enforcing its ideology on the citizenry, using its power structures (Raghunath, 1988). In the study of the political economy of media presently, the

ruling class is often conceptualised as the government and the dominant ideology is its own political propaganda (Yilmaz, Mesut; Kirazolugu, 2014). Many researchers, such as Berger (1992), Hall (1977) and Williams (1976) have established that media channels are altered to propagate dominant ideology (as cited in Yilmaz, Mesut; Kirazolugu, 2014).

Dominant ideology is created and propagated due to lack of diversity in media, aided by the concentration of media ownership (Abercrombie & Turner, 1978). The primary indicates that the rise in popularity of mythology may be connected to the creation of a Hindu identity, largely associated with the right-wing government. Being the government in power, they could use the concentrated structure of the publishing industry or may already be using it to promote ideologies suited to their political agenda.

The analysis is consistent with the radical media political economies school of thought. There is underproduction of diverse content because of a lack of perceived commercial demand for it. Publishing houses ignore their ethical responsibilities due to the capitalist nature of the industry and circulate commercially successful content in lieu of profits.

Conclusion

The study examined the structure of Indian publishing industry and its impact on the diversity of content produced, for the genre of mythology. The rising popularity of mythology and trends of mergers/acquisitions in the industry prompted this study, as an exploratory endeavor. The exponential increase in consumption of media and industry expansion has led to conglomeration/concentration of ownership, which has had a deteriorating impact on diversity of content, in some contexts. The lack of an established relationship between concentration and diversity, has created a divided house among theorists. While some suggest the existence of a causal relationship, on the basis of the neoclassical political economies of media, proponents of the radical political economies of media believe otherwise.

This research found that less diverse content continues to be produced because it is commercially successful and the industry is organised in a capitalist setting. Selective exposure theory indicated that less diverse content also continues to be consumed because it reinforces people's existing ideology. The market for publishing was found to not be competitive, since publishing houses exercised power in hampering the flow, type and diversity of content in circulation. Such disruption was largely attributed to concentration in ownership. Dominant ideology theory illustrated that degrading diversity of content indicated a possibility towards propagation of ideologies in favor of the ruling class. There is scope for conducting a comprehensive content analysis across different forms of media, to understand the degree of diversity and affinity for propagating dominant ideology. Since most media conglomerates are organised globally, it would be interesting to see if their dominance in Indian media has promoted the adoption of western frameworks. The task ahead would be to identify the contribution of the media in propagating certain ideologies, and if the nature of such ideologies is associated with national political agenda or global western hegemony.

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