

## Myth and Reality in Victory City by Salman Rushdie

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### Abstract

The novel *Victory City* by Salman Rushdie explores the complex relationship between myth and historical reality through the story of the fictional empire of Bisnaga. Inspired by the historical Vijayanagara Empire, the narrative blends myth, legend, and history to reinterpret the formation and decline of civilizations. Through the character of Pampa Kampana, who receives divine inspiration from Pampa Devi, Rushdie demonstrates how myths shape political authority, cultural identity, and historical memory. This paper examines how the novel combines mythical imagination with historical realities to question the nature of history, storytelling, and cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Myth, History, Identity, Empire, Storytelling

### Introduction

The relationship between myth and reality has always played an important role in literature and cultural history. Myths are not merely imaginative stories; they shape the way societies understand their past and

define their cultural identity. As Mircea Eliade explains, “*myth narrates a sacred history and explains how reality came into existence*” (Eliade 5). This perspective highlights how myths function as cultural

narratives that provide meaning and legitimacy to social institutions and historical events.

In *Victory City*, Salman Rushdie deliberately blurs the boundary between myth and history. The novel is inspired by the rise and fall of the Vijayanagara Empire, one of the most powerful kingdoms in South India. However, rather than presenting a purely historical account, Rushdie creates the fictional city of Bisnaga, where myth and historical reality coexist and interact. Through this imaginative narrative, the novel explores how civilizations are shaped not only by political events but also by myths, legends, and storytelling traditions. By merging mythical imagination with historical references, Rushdie questions the reliability of historical narratives and highlights the power of storytelling in constructing cultural memory.

One of the central aspects of *Victory City* is the use of myth to explain the origin and development of the empire. The narrative begins with Pampa Kampana, who survives a traumatic event and receives divine inspiration from Pampa Devi. Through this supernatural encounter, she is given the power to create and guide the city of Bisnaga.

The mythical origin of the city reflects the idea that civilizations often rely on symbolic narratives to legitimize their

existence and authority. According to Roland Barthes, “myth is a type of speech chosen by history” (Barthes 110). In this sense, myths function as cultural explanations that give meaning to historical events. In Rushdie’s novel, the myth of Pampa Kampana becomes the foundation upon which the identity and political authority of Bisnaga are constructed.

Although myth plays a crucial role in the narrative, the novel also reflects historical realities. The rise and fall of Bisnaga closely parallels the historical trajectory of the Vijayanagara Empire. Rushdie depicts the political ambitions of rulers, internal conflicts, and the eventual decline of the empire. Through these events, the novel illustrates how political power is shaped by human ambition and social conflict. As Hayden White observes, “historical narratives are verbal fictions whose contents are as much invented as found” (White 82). This idea suggests that history itself is often shaped by interpretation and narrative structure. Rushdie’s blending of myth and history reflects this concept by presenting historical events through imaginative storytelling.

Another important theme in the novel is the role of storytelling in shaping historical understanding. The narrative is presented as a chronicle written by Pampa Kampana, who records the story of the

empire across generations. This narrative technique emphasizes that history is often constructed through storytelling.

The relationship between memory and narrative plays a significant role in Rushdie's works. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie writes that "memory has its own special kind of truth" (Rushdie 211). This statement reflects the idea that historical narratives are shaped by personal memories and interpretations rather than objective facts. Similarly, in *Victory City*, the chronicle of Bisnaga represents a blend of historical events and imaginative storytelling.

Myths often function as collective memories that connect communities to their cultural past. They preserve traditions, values, and historical consciousness across generations. According to Joseph Campbell, "myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths" (Campbell 48). This perspective highlights the emotional and symbolic power of myth in shaping cultural identity. In *Victory City*, the story of Bisnaga becomes a symbolic representation of cultural heritage. By blending mythical elements with historical references, Rushdie illustrates how societies construct narratives that preserve their collective memory.

Another important dimension of the novel is Rushdie's use of myth as a narrative strategy. The long life span of

Pampa Kampana and the presence of divine inspiration give the narrative an epic quality similar to traditional mythological texts.

Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon describes this technique as historiographic metafiction, which "acknowledges the paradox of the past as both real and constructed" (Hutcheon 95). Rushdie's narrative illustrates this paradox by presenting historical events through mythic storytelling while simultaneously questioning the nature of historical truth.

The character of Pampa Kampana also allows Rushdie to explore the relationship between myth and gender. Traditionally, historical narratives about empires and kingdoms have been dominated by male rulers and warriors. In contrast, *Victory City* places a woman at the centre of both myth and history. Pampa Kampana not only witnesses the rise and fall of the empire but also actively shapes its destiny through her words and imagination.

Her connection with the goddess Pampa Devi further strengthens the mythical dimension of female power in the novel. Through this relationship, Rushdie suggests that women's voices and creative energies have often been overlooked in traditional historical accounts. By placing Pampa Kampana at the centre of the narrative, the novel reimagines history from a different

perspective, where myth becomes a tool for restoring forgotten voices.

The city of Bisnaga functions as a powerful symbol in the novel. It represents not only a political empire but also a cultural and imaginative space where myth and reality coexist. The city's rapid rise reflects the power of ambition and imagination, while its eventual decline illustrates the fragile nature of political authority.

The symbolic portrayal of the city parallels the historical rise and fall of the Vijayanagara Empire. By transforming historical events into a mythic narrative, Rushdie reflects on the impermanence of civilizations and the enduring power of storytelling.

Another important element in the novel is the treatment of time. In mythological narratives, time is often cyclical rather than linear. Rushdie adopts a similar approach by allowing the life of Pampa Kampana to span several generations.

This extended time frame allows the narrative to move across centuries while maintaining mythic continuity. Even when historical structures collapse, the stories associated with them continue to survive.

The blending of myth and reality in Victory City reflects Rushdie's broader literary philosophy. He suggests that imagination plays a crucial role in shaping

the way people perceive reality. As Salman Rushdie notes, "imagination and reality are not opposites but partners in the creation of stories" (Rushdie 14). Through this perspective, the novel demonstrates that myth and history are not separate categories but interconnected forms of narrative that shape human understanding of the past.

In conclusion, Victory City presents a compelling exploration of the relationship between myth and historical reality. Through the story of Bisnaga and the visionary role of Pampa Kampana, Salman Rushdie demonstrates how myths shape political authority, cultural identity, and historical memory. The novel reveals that history is not merely a collection of facts but a narrative shaped by imagination, memory, and interpretation. By blending myth with historical elements, Rushdie challenges readers to reconsider the nature of historical truth and the role of storytelling in shaping cultural consciousness. Ultimately, the novel suggests that myth and reality are deeply interconnected, forming the foundation of human civilization and collective memory.

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