



From myth to modernism: Reflecting Bangladesh student resistance 2024 in Abu Hasan Shahriar's "Ekolobyer Punorutthan"

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Abstract

Ekoloby (or Ekalavya), the mythological character of *The Mahabharata*, is admired for his outstanding archery skills and unparalleled devotion towards his so-called master, Dronacharya. In Abu Hasan Shahriar's "Ekolobyer Punorutthan" (translated as "The Resurrection of Ekalavya"), written during the 1990s, this character is reimagined as a symbolic figure of the Bangladesh Student Resistance (BSR) 2024. This study seeks to explore the depth of that resistance in the context of national democratic restoration and reformation, as expressed through Ekalavya. Unlike the mythological precursor, Ekalavya emerges as a contemplative rebel and conscious resistor of socio-political injustice, challenging fascist structures, and refuses both integration and indifference. He becomes the voice of the oppressed, resisting authoritarianism and striving for an equitable democratic state. Following a qualitative textual analysis and the theories of Subaltern Studies and mythical deconstructionism, this paper inspects how the themes and selected verses of the poem condense mass revolution against socio-political corruption. The poem stations Ekalavya as a metaphor for marginalized communities confronting the suppressive ideologies of the ancient Aryan rulers in the poem, representing the modern autocrats. Ultimately, "Ekolobyer Punorutthan" stands as a manifesto of protest and resistance of the 21st century and literary embodiment of the enduring pursuit of justice, equality, and democracy of Bangladeshi Generation (Gen) Z youths.

Keywords: Ekalavya, July Uprising 2024, Mythical Deconstructionism, Resistance Literature, Subaltern Studies

Introduction

Myth is a vital form of figurative expression in Bangladeshi literature, providing

writers with a means to appraise identity, power, and social resistance. Since the times of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam to

the contemporary age, writers have been employing myths to convey political, social, and cultural structures, deconstructing familiar stories, events, and characters to challenge concurrent hegemonies. Rather than remaining static, myth functions as a flexible narrative strategy that enables authors to expose injustice and confront authority effectively. Acting both as a protective veil and as an instrument of creative expression, myth empowers marginalized voices to speak in contexts where direct opposition may be thoroughly suppressed. In this way, the reworking of myth in Bangladeshi literature becomes a dynamic site of socio-political resistance, where symbolic narratives question dominant power and sustain collective hope for liberation.

One prominent mythological figure frequently referred in South Asian literature, including Bangladeshi writings, is Ekalavya, whose story embodies devotion, resistance, and social hierarchy. A prince of the Nishada tribe and a self-taught archer in the Sanskrit epic *The Mahabharata*, Ekalavya was denied formal instruction by Dronacharya, who trained upper-caste Kshatriya students, including his favorite, Arjuna. Despite this rejection, he trained himself while mentally acknowledging Drona as his revered guru. When Ekalavya surpassed Arjuna in archery, Drona demanded his thumb as a tribute, and Ekalavya, demonstrating ultimate devotion, complied with his insistence (Wisdomlib, 2025). His story conveys both sacrifice and obedience as well as the injustice of hierarchical structures that demand one-sided loyalty from marginalized subjects.

Building on this myth, the researcher selects Abu Hasan Shahriar's poem "Ekolobber Punorutthan" (The Resurrection of Eklavya) and reimagines Ekalavya's story as a vehicle for contemporary social criticism. Shahriar (b. 1959), a modern Bangladeshi poet, litterateur, and journalist, has served as a literary editor in a number of prominent newspapers and received the Bangla Academy Literary Award for poetry in 2016. His notable works include

Ontoheen Mayabee Bhromon (1986), *Ekolobber Punorutthan* (1999), *Arai Okkhor* (2007), and *Tomader Kacher Shohore* (2008), among others (Abu Hasan Shahriar, 2025). Although "Ekolobber Punorutthan" is composed towards the end of the 20th century as a social allegory, its themes highly associate with the 21st century political circumstances of Bangladesh. In the poem, Ekalavya refuses to sacrifice his thumb, challenging the oppressive caste system and authoritarian hierarchy. Through this reimagining, Shahriar criticizes blind obedience and social discrimination while advocating justice and equality across all social classes.

The issues of resistance and critique of authority in literature resonate strongly with the contemporary socio-political movement of the Bangladesh Student Resistance (BSR) 2024. Also known as the July Uprising or July Revolution, this pro-democratic mass movement unfolded between June 5 and August 5, 2024. It began as a campaign of the Anti-discrimination Student Movement to reform the biased job recruitment quotas of the then government and escalated into widespread street protests, despite curfews, genocides, and state suppression (Ahmad, 2025). The movement culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with the fall of the Awami League (AL) led regime, and the formation of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus as Chief Advisor (Mahi, 2024). This mass uprising reformed Bangladesh's political landscape and activated a broader cultural revival, inspiring hope, resilience, and renewed nationalism among the younger generation, particularly known as the Generation (Gen) Z (Monamee, 2024).

All together, these literary and historical examples illustrate how myth and narrative function as powerful instruments of resistance, providing both symbolic and practical frameworks for challenging established power structures. This study investigates the reworking of myth in Bangladeshi literature as a medium of socio-

political analysis and a reflection of contemporary struggles for justice and equity.

Literature Review

Mythic Resistance Across Contexts

Recent relevant studies depict how myth is used to represent social and cultural resistance around the world. Saad (2021) examines the idea of aesthetic resistance in Nancy Morejón's poetry, showing how mythology becomes a insistent instrument to contest suppression and marginalization. Drawing on the mythos of Orishas such as Elegguá and Yemayá, he argues that Morejón uses these figures as symbols of cultural identity, resilience, and combined resistance. Through poems like "The Eyes of Elegguá," "By the Gulf," and "In Praise of Nieves Fresneda," she promotes the recuperation of a unified identity that embraces African heritage within the wider Caribbean experience, using transculturation to merge African and Cuban cultural elements. This artistic strategy reinforces an Afro-Cuban identity that declines marginalization by utilizing the aesthetic force of myth and poetry. Similarly, Fathonah (2020) discusses how Eka Kurniawan's novel *Man Tiger* employs remythologization as a form of decolonial resistance, where supernatural elements serve not merely as literary devices but as a critique of Indonesia's social and political realities. By reconstructing the myth of the "manusia harimau" (were-tiger), Kurniawan resists hegemonic power structures and colonial ideologies, restoring space for disregarded local voices. In a comparable way, Parial and Banerjee (2020) inspect Sanjukta Dasgupta's poem "Lakshmi Unbound: A Soliloquy," which challenges patriarchal myths that confine women to ideals of purity and self-sacrifice. By reimagining Lakshmi as rebellious, the poem demythologizes the "angel in the house" stereotype, offering a feminist counter-narrative that rebuilds women's identity and resists oppressive cultural and gender norms. Thus, Asian and Afro-American authors employed

diverse mythical narratives as direct instruments to interrogate power, inequality and domination.

The Role of Myth in Bengali Literature

Myth has been a central feature in Bengali literature, enabling poets to explore cultural values, human experience, and social account through symbolic storytelling. Rasheed and Kakhandi (2021) examine that Rabindranath Tagore uses symbolic and mythical imagery from Indian culture and mythology in his short stories to transmit deeper social and moral messages. Stories like "Sampatti Samarpan" and "Putrayajna" criticized traditional beliefs such as greed and the fertility myth, while "Anadhikar Prabesh" highlights humanity and kindness over rigid religious rituals. These symbols, including mythic figures and natural imagery, enriched Tagore's narrative to reflect cultural values and complex human emotions. In a comparable way, Sarkar (2024) envisions how Jibanananda Das rewrites regional history and myths in his poetry and prose to recreate cultural and historical identities of Bengal and India. Das's poems such as "Banalata Sen," "I Have Seen the Face of Bengal," and "The Chariot of History" blend mythological narratives of Vidharbha, Vidisa and *Manasa Mangal* (the epic of the serpent-goddess) with historical references to present a unified Bengali cultural identity. His paper argues that Das's narrative technique, merging myth and history, is crucial for formulating native knowledge and preserving collective memory, thus restoring identities across generations in Bengali literature and beyond. Moreover, Adhikari (2025) discusses that Kazi Nazrul Islam's poetry, including poems like "Bidrohi" (The Rebel) and "Manush" (Man), masterfully incorporates diverse myths as symbols of defiance, compassion, rebellion and social justice, for instance, Prometheus of the Greek mythology, Hindu figures like Lord Krishna, and Islamic references such as Archangel Gabriel. By merging these indigenous and foreign myths,

Nazrul crafts a cosmopolitan vision that promotes resistance against tyranny and unifies diverse communities, reflecting his humanist zeal and revolutionary spirit. This mythological synthesis not only enriches Bengali literary tradition but also serves as a vehicle for political and cultural liberation across colonial and patriarchal constraints. In short, these studies indicate how myth serves to explore social norms, affirm cultural identity, and cultivate shared consciousness.

Student Resistance 2024 through Art and Culture

BSR 2024 inspired a wide range of scholarly interpretations that review how cultural, spiritual, and digital mediums shaped the nation's collective consciousness. One concurrent study by Ahana (2024) demonstrates how art and literature during the movement conveyed messages of resilience through creative expressions that fostered political mobilization and collective identity. The paper argues that protest poetry, murals, and digital art re-envisioned traditional symbols of resistance within modern cultural frameworks. Its findings reinforce how Bangladeshi cultural production bridges classical and modern craftsmanship to voice youth resistance against years of systemic injustice. Likewise, Chowdhury (2024) observes the movement from a Sufi perspective. Drawing upon the teachings of revered Islamic scholars and leaders such as Shah Jalal and Haji Shariatullah, many Bangladeshi students were spiritually prepared to embrace martyrdom in their struggles against tyranny, aiming to reinstate the fundamental principles of Islam and fulfill moral and spiritual duties. The Sufi ideals of self-sacrifice and devotion inspired students to ignite a mass revolution and challenge autocratic governance. Additionally, Ahmed and Ashraf (2025) emphasize the crucial role of media narratives on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in propagating revolutionary ideas and mobilizing public sentiment. Trending hashtags, tweet streams, and online posts served

as modern forms of expression against hegemonic political practices, amplifying voices of opposition and collective empowerment. Al Amin (2024) also notes that the viral footages of martyrs including Abu Sayeed and Mir Mugdho drove revolutionary sentiment and resistance against the fascist AL government. Together, these studies illustrate how BSR 2024 emerged as a multidimensional movement in which art, spirituality and digital media navigated to construct a unified language of protest and optimism.

Research Focus

While scholarship explore how myth impacts cultural identity and inspires resistance, there is limited research on how contemporary Bangladeshi poetry engages myth to reflect the recent student movement. Abu Hasan Shahriar's "Ekolobyer Punorutthan" remains largely unexamined as a work that deconstructs myth to heighten the voices and actions of the students involved in BSR 2024. The current study intends to investigate the poem as a literary piece of mythical deconstructionism, showing how traditional myth is equipped to analyze hegemonic power and augment subaltern perspectives.

The research addresses the following questions:

- How does the poem use myth to show the struggles and hopes of BSR 2024?
- In what ways does the poem contest existing political power through reworking the myth?
- How do myth and modern literary techniques together express BSR 2024?

By introducing the poem within a subaltern framework, the study combines classical myth with modernist literary expression to illuminate both literary and socio-political dimensions of the student resistance.

Theoretical and methodological approaches

Mythical deconstructionism studies myths not as fixed truths but as texts full of contradictions and hidden meanings. (Fiveable, 2025). By questioning the apparent logic and universality of myths, it uncovers the assumptions and biases underlying them. It also allows readers to see myths as dynamic, living stories that can offer different meanings across time and context, Malan (2016) emphasizes that this approach “demythologizes” myths while highlighting their symbolic and cultural significance. It experiments on how myths reflect culture, power, and ideology, breaking them down to reveal multiple interpretations.

Additionally, Subaltern Studies investigates the experiences of marginalized groups excluded from dominant power structures. Gramsci (1971) introduced the concept of the “subaltern” to describe people whose voices are ignored in politics and culture. Spivak (1988) further argued that structural inequalities often prevent subalterns from being truly heard, questioning whether they can “speak” within dominant discourses. Their ideas emphasize the need to recognize subaltern agencies while acknowledging the constrictions imposed by social hierarchies. This approach is widely used to reinterpret history, literature, and cultural narratives from the perspective of marginalized communities.

Synthetically, Subaltern Studies often depends on a form of mythical deconstructionism because it seeks to disassemble the mythic structures, including colonial, nationalist, bourgeois, patriarchal hierarchies that present themselves as self-evident chronicles of history, identity, and agency. Deconstructing these myths is what makes the subaltern noticeable as a subject of history rather than being non-existent within dominant discourse. Hence, it clears and creates space for alternative voices and experiences to surface on their own terms.

The research employs a qualitative textual analysis to examine the themes and verses of “Ekolobyer Punorutthan,” highlighting its portrayal of BSR 2024. The researcher has translated the poem herself and selected its specific verses that significantly resonate with her purpose of research. In addition, using mythical deconstructionism as a framework, the research critically scrutinizes the traditional myth of Ekalavya to reveal how it is reimagined to encounter social hierarchies and prevailing narratives. Parallely, Subaltern Studies guides the investigation of marginalized perspectives, depicting how the poem highlights subaltern acts and actions of resistance. Therefore, these approaches facilitate an interpretive reading of the language of the poem along with its symbolism, and socio-political consequence.

Discussion

Myth as Mirror: Reflecting the Struggles and Hopes of BSR 2024

Shahriar’s “Ekolobyer Punorutthan” reinterprets the myth of Ekalavya to reflect the struggles and aspirations of the BSR 2024. Using mythical deconstructionism, the poem dismantles the traditional portrayal of Ekalavya as obedient and self-sacrificing, exposing the hidden power imbalances and hierarchies within the myth. When Ekalavya declares, “Place the word-arrow in my eager palms. I go to war,” (translated from Shahriar, 1999) the poem focuses on the transformation of passive submission into active resistance and resoluteness, questioning the authority of Dronacharya in the same way BSR 2024 challenged authoritarian political structures, discriminatory quotas, and state violence through frequent protests and (Malan, 2016). By destabilizing the myth, Shahriar highlights the ways in which power operates and legitimizes itself through ideology and tradition.

Through the lens of Subaltern Studies, Ekalavya becomes a metaphor for marginalized students who are excluded from state privilege

yet act with agency, intellect, and moral conviction. His exclusion from the “assembly of elders” (translated from Shahriar, 1999) mirrors the students’ denial of political representation and the repression they faced during the movement, including curfews, censorship, and police brutality (Spivak, 1988). By giving Ekalavya a central, assertive voice—“I have come alone... I go to war” (translated from Shahriar, 1999) —the poem constructs a space in which the subaltern can speak, asserting autonomy and resistance against systemic injustice, much like the Gen Z activists of BSR 2024.

The poem also reconceives the *guru-dakshina* episode and natural imagery symbolizing hope, justice, and reclaimed legitimacy. Ekalavya’s reflection, “I know not whether success comes through guru-dakshina; I will weigh up in scales now and pay that guru-dakshina” (translated from Shahriar, 1999), criticizes the exploitation entrenched in hierarchical systems, paralleling how students defied political orders and defended their rights against corruption. Natural imagery of the earth, trees, and water also becomes a democratic assembly where the subaltern belongs, reflecting how students reclaimed public and digital spaces as arenas of collective identity. Finally, Ekalavya’s refusal to forget humiliation— “I have not forgotten the humiliation. Therefore, I shall not again become forgiving at heart” (translated from Shahriar, 1999) —frames memory as resistance, echoing the role of historical memory in BSR 2024. Through these strategies, Shahriar transforms the myth into a symbol of political revolt, aspiration, and continuing resilience for marginalized communities.

Reworking of Myth: Expressing Political Resistance

The poem “Ekolobyer Punorutthan” contests existing political power by transforming the myth of Ekalavya into a symbol of subaltern resistance. Unlike The

Mahabharata narrative, where original Ekalavya submits to the thumb demand of Dronacharya, Shahriar’s Ekalavya refuses passive compliance and asserts autonomous intervention. His repeated invocation—“Give me initiation. Place the word-arrow in my eager palms. I go to war” (translated from Shahriar, 1999) — metaphorically stages a rebellion against hierarchical authority, echoing the aspirations of marginalized groups to claim knowledge and power denied to them. Through this reworking, Shahriar critiques elitist structures, evocative of the authoritarian political climate that suppressed youth opposition in Bangladesh, while simultaneously asserting that wisdom and mastery are not privileges of the socially dominant alone (Malan, 2016; Spivak, 1988). Ekalavya’s “war” with the “word-arrow” becomes a poetic metaphor for challenging entrenched hierarchies, suggesting that intellectual and cultural declaration can contest power much like physical actions.

The poem further subverts political authority by deconstructing the roles of revered figures, particularly Dronacharya and Arjuna, whose legendary status historically reinforces caste and social hierarchies. Shahriar’s Ekalavya disrupts this symbolic power by demonstrating superior mastery through “the sound of words I hurl lines. Words in silence. I smash Arjuna’s pride of supreme caste.” (translated from Shahriar, 1999), thereby turning mythic subordination into condemnation of political and cultural elitism. The amazement of the elders—“Dronacharya is astounded! Arjuna too has no end to his astonishment!” (translated from Shahriar, 1999) —highlights the destabilization of established hierarchies, mirroring the interference of authoritarian political structures during BSR 2024 (Ahmad, 2025; Al Amin, 2024). By transforming the act of archery into a tool of poetic and intellectual rebellion, Shahriar portrays resistance as a conscious and strategic intervention against systems that claim legitimacy through tradition and authority.

Lastly, the poem reclaims subaltern subjectivity by centering the experience of humiliation and marginalization as a source of enduring political consciousness. Shahriar's Ekalavya articulates a negation to forget historical injustice: "I am Ekalavya, I have not forgotten the humiliation. Therefore, I shall not again become forgiving at heart." (translated from Shahriar, 1999). This conscious remembrance reframes suffering as a weapon against authoritarian control, corresponding to how the students of BSR 2024 assembled collective memory and social grievance to challenge the ruling elite (Ahana, 2024; Chowdhury, 2024). By linking mythic injustice to contemporary political oppression, the poem constructs a literary space where the subaltern can confront, disprove and destabilize dominant power structures ultimately. In this way, Shahriar not only re-explains Ekalavya's myth but also crafts a poetic platform of resistance that legitimizes opposition and subverts traditional hierarchies in both literary and political contexts.

From *The Mahabharata* to BSR 2024: Ekalavya and Gen Z Youths

"Ekolobyer Punorutthan" blends myth and modern literary techniques to reflect the struggles and aspirations of the BSR 2024, positioning each Gen Z participant as a contemporary Ekalavya. By invoking the classical figure of Ekalavya from *The Mahabharata*, renowned for his devotion, skill, and subaltern status, the poem creates a symbolic analogy between the marginalized archer and modern students confronting systemic injustice. The final lines—"Though I am Ekalavya, I have not forgotten the humiliation. Therefore, I shall not again become forgiving at heart" (translated from Shahriar, 1999)—articulate the collective consciousness of a generation unwilling to accept oppression passively. Here, the use of myth allows each student to identify as both a historical and modern figure of resistance. It connects Ekalavya's personal courage with students'

communal action and transforming classical narrative into a living symbol of socio-political noncompliance.

Modern literary techniques amplify this mythic connection by foregrounding interiority, immediacy, and poetic self-reflexivity. Shahriar employs first-person narration, direct address, and repetition—"I have come alone, I am Ekalavya" (translated from Shahriar, 1999)—to immerse readers in the subjective experience of resistance, echoing the personal intervention of each student in BSR 2024. The rhythmic cadences and strategic enjambments of the poem mimic the persistence of protest, while metaphors such as "I eat life and survive" (translated from Shahriar, 1999) convey resilience and refusal to succumb to unjust devotion. These stylistic choices allow the mythic Ekalavya to operate not just as a literary allusion but as an embodied consciousness, so that every Gen Z student becomes a living legendary persistence of the subaltern figure: disciplined, skilled, and determined to confront authority.

The synthesis of myth and modern literary expression transforms Ekalavya into a generational prototype, providing both moral inspiration and practical metaphor for the student resistance. Just as the original Ekalavya negotiated hierarchy and injustice through skill and perseverance, and Shahriar's Ekalavya encountered the hierarchy with words and actions, the students of 2024 enact their activities through organized protest, digital mobilization, and intellectual demonstration. The verses in the concluding stanza accentuate retention and vigilance—"I believe in myths no more, ... May envy not build its home near forgiveness" (translated from Shahriar, 1999). These verses correlate historical suppression with contemporary activism, and reinforce the idea that resistance is amassed and embodied across time. Here, the notion of myths itself becomes a symbol of authoritarian hierarchy, and modern people resist for the greater purpose of survival in life. In his way, Shahriar positions every Gen

Z participant as a dual Ekalavya: a figure rooted in classical mythology and reimagined as a modern agent of justice, demonstrating how literature can transform myth into a dynamic instrument for political and cultural expression.

Conclusion

Myth helps us understand social discrimination and the mute voices of ordinary people. In the ancient story of Ekalavya from *The Mahabharata*, powerful groups keep control by silencing others, showing the unfairness in the socio-political hierarchy. This serves as an analogy of how the government in Bangladesh treated ordinary students and mass unfairly. But in Abu Hasan Shahriar's poem "Ekolobyer Punorutthan," Ekalavya turns to a symbol of courage and resistance, representing the voices of young students who fought against injustice in 2024. Instead of obeying and yielding, this new Ekalavya stands up and fights for impartiality and equality.

Thereby, re-reading of myths might be able to give power to people who survive as socially ignored. Shahriar's poem uses the old story in a new way to inspire young people to challenge unfair systems. It proves that myths are not just old stories but living ideas that can help people resist oppression and work for a better society. By turning Ekalavya into a symbol of faith, hope and strength, the poem connects the past with the present and encourages ongoing struggles for justice and democracy in Bangladesh.

The study recommends future researchers to examine other Bengali poems, both from earlier to existing ages and analyze how various myths, folklores and histories of the sub-continent represent political histories, in particular political resistance of the subaltern communities. Very few studies have been conducted on consolidating BSR 2024 and Bengali literature. Further research work could explore other related issues and contribute highly to resistance literature in Bangladesh.

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