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AN INDO-GREEK AXIS: EXPANDING THE PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE HSC CLASS XII HISTORY OF THE NOVEL CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the pedagogical framework of the Maharashtra State Board HSC Class XII English lesson "History of Novel" and argues for a more comparative account of the history of narrative. The prescribed lesson acknowledges Greek Romances, Murasaki Shikibu's The Tale of Genji and an Indian Scenario, but its historical organisation gives substantial emphasis to the development of the European and English novel. The study investigates the limited comparative integration of major Indian and Greek epic traditions into the genealogy of fiction. Combining close textual analysis with survey feedback from HSC learners (N = 60) and English teachers (N = 28), student responses indicate strong interest in connecting ancient narrative with modern fiction while identifying memorisation, chronology and terminology as recurring challenges. Teacher responses show strong support for a comparative Indo-Greek perspective while raising practical implementation concerns regarding time, classical complexity and resource availability. The study proposes a concise, scaffolded Indo-Greek comparative supplement rather than wholesale replacement of the existing curriculum.

KEYWORDS: *History of the Novel, Indo-Greek Axis, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Homer, Pedagogy, Comparative Literature, HSC English, Narrative Genealogy*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary history is not merely a chronology of authors, texts and periods; it is also a framework for deciding which traditions are presented as formative and how students understand continuity and change. In the HSC Class XII English curriculum, the lesson "History of Novel" provides students with an account of the development of prose fiction. While useful, its architecture invites a critical question: can the history of the novel be taught more effectively if storytelling is presented comparatively across civilisations?

The present study approaches that question through an Indo-Greek axis. The term does not imply that Indian and Greek traditions are identical, nor does it claim a direct historical line of descent from epic to modern novel. Instead, it proposes a structural comparison of narrative functions—characterisation, moral conflict, psychological interiority, heroic archetypes, multigenerational plotting, embedded narratives and complex human relationships. Such comparison helps students recognise that techniques associated with modern fiction have deep ancient precedents.

This argument is framed as a curricular expansion rather than a rejection of the existing lesson. The textbook includes references to Greek Romances, The Tale of Genji and an Indian Scenario. The research question is therefore one of proportion, integration and pedagogy: how might these acknowledged fragments be connected into a sustained comparative framework?

1.1 Background and Rationale

The modern European novel developed through complex historical processes and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers hold an established place in literary history. A pedagogical issue arises when the chronological development of the European novel becomes the primary lens through which students understand all narrative history. Ancient epics, romances and frame narratives supply conceptual precedents for plot architecture, character conflict, ethical choice and psychological representation.

The Indo-Greek comparison is effective because the Mahabharata and Ramayana, alongside Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, offer rich material for comparing heroism, duty, loyalty, conflict, exile, return and moral ambiguity. A further intellectual dimension involves the history of comparative linguistics. In his 1786 Third Anniversary Discourse to the Asiatic Society, Sir William Jones identified structural affinities among Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, pointing toward a common linguistic origin (Jones 1788). This study invokes Jones to contextualise the history of comparative inquiry while strictly distinguishing linguistic relatedness from direct literary influence.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed by this study is not that the HSC lesson contains no early or non-European material, but that its acknowledged non-European examples are not developed into an integrated comparative genealogy. Students encounter ancient traditions as isolated references while studying the European novel as the primary sequence of narrative development. A short comparative module could connect the historical survey to epic passages, enabling students to analyse narrative continuity and transformation rather than rely on rote memorisation.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To examine the historical and pedagogical structure of the prescribed HSC Class XII "History of Novel" lesson.
- 2) To identify the extent to which Indian and Greek pre-modern narrative traditions are integrated.
- 3) To investigate students' perceptions of the current approach and their interest in comparative ancient narrative.
- 4) To evaluate English teachers' views on the value and feasibility of an Indo-Greek comparative framework.
- 5) To formulate a balanced curricular recommendation that expands the existing lesson without creating excessive workload.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How does the prescribed lesson construct the historical genealogy of the novel?
- 2) To what extent does it integrate Indian and Greek pre-modern narrative traditions?
- 3) How do students perceive the value of connecting ancient epics with modern fiction?
- 4) How do English teachers evaluate the proposed Indo-Greek comparative framework?
- 5) What implementation model is most feasible within the existing HSC classroom context?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a mixed qualitative-quantitative exploratory pedagogical design combining formal documentary analysis of the prescribed textbook with descriptive survey evidence and thematic qualitative analysis. The research evaluates perceptions of the existing History of Novel lesson and investigates the perceived feasibility of a comparative supplement.

4.2 Research Setting

The research was situated within the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) educational framework of the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (MSBSHSE), focusing on junior colleges across the urban and suburban districts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Maharashtra, India.

4.3 Target Population and Participant Selection

The target population comprised two primary stakeholder groups engaged with the HSC English curriculum:

- HSC Class XII Students: Senior-secondary learners currently enrolled in Class XII, typically falling within the 16–18 age demographic, actively engaged with the English Yuvakbharati course.
- Junior College English Faculty: Active English teachers and lecturers instructing Class XII HSC cohorts, ranging from early-career educators to senior faculty members and heads of department experienced in state board evaluation standards.

4.4 Institutional Representation

Data was gathered across state-board-affiliated junior colleges representing varied student socio-economic and demographic backgrounds within the urban and suburban districts of the region.

4.5 Sampling Method and Recruitment

The study utilized a non-probability convenience sampling strategy supplemented by voluntary response sampling. Questionnaires were distributed digitally through professional educator networks, academic forums and institutional channels. Participation was strictly voluntary.

4.6 Questionnaire Development

Two distinct, structured survey instruments were developed specifically for this study, aligned directly with the central research questions:

1. Teacher Evaluation Instrument: Designed to capture curricular perceptions, diagnostic views on Eurocentrism, pedagogical feasibility, preferred supplementary formats and practical implementation constraints.
2. Student Engagement Instrument: Designed to measure learner familiarity with ancient epics, perceptions of textbook complexity/memorisation burden, interest in cross-cultural comparisons and preferred learning modalities.

4.7 Question Types and Structure

The survey instruments integrated a mix of question formats to balance quantifiable metrics with detailed qualitative insights:

- Dichotomous & Likert-scale items: To quantify agreement regarding curricular bias, feasibility and interdisciplinary benefits.
- Ordinal and ranking items: To evaluate interest levels and familiarity with narrative traditions.
- Multiple-selection items: To identify preferred teaching tools, narrative elements and practical challenges.
- Open-ended textual fields: To capture qualitative feedback regarding learning difficulties, memorisation loads and classroom experiences.

4.8 Period of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out digitally during the 2026 academic term, corresponding with the instruction window for Section 4 ("Genre-Novel") of the Class XII English syllabus.

4.9 Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (absolute frequencies, relative percentages and response totals) to aggregate Likert ratings and multiple-choice preferences. Data discrepancies or non-mutually exclusive multiple-choice categories were explicitly retained and noted as descriptive indicators. Qualitative open-ended feedback was analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's framework to categorize recurring student challenges (rote learning, terminology, chronology) and teacher concerns.

5. TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS: SECTION 4.1 "HISTORY OF NOVEL" & THE INDO-GREEK COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

The prescribed lesson begins by placing the history of the novel in a long chronological frame and recognises early forms and antecedents. It refers to Greek Romances and identifies Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* (c. 1010) as an important early landmark. It subsequently moves through Cervantes and *Don Quixote* and develops a substantial account of the English novel and its major writers. The lesson later includes an Indian Scenario and introduces the novella, elements of novel/novella and types of novel.

The lesson therefore cannot accurately be described as a purely European or exclusively English account. Its pedagogical limitation lies elsewhere: the ancient Greek, Japanese and Indian references are not developed into a sustained comparative narrative architecture in which students can systematically compare epic and later fictional techniques.

The section on elements of novel/novella—theme, plot, character, setting, conflict and language/style—offers an especially useful point of intervention. These categories can be applied comparatively to selected passages from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and then to modern novels.

METHODOLOGICAL CAUTION: EPISTEMIC SPECIFICITY VS. REDUCTIVE UNIVERSALISM

While comparative models provide valuable heuristics for tracing narrative continuity across civilisations, they carry a distinct risk of becoming reductive if cultural, historical and contextual specificities are ignored. Forced structural comparisons such as subsuming disparate mythological traditions under a singular, universalizing "monomyth" template can flatten nuanced socio-religious, ethical and aesthetic distinctions unique to individual literary traditions. To avoid essentialist homogenization, this study does not claim an identity between Indian and Greek epic traditions, nor does it propose a direct historical line of descent from ancient epics to the modern European novel. Instead, the proposed Indo-Greek comparative axis operates as an analytical tool to examine how different cultures independently address shared human dilemmas, character motivations and structural storytelling devices. Comparing figures like Arjuna and Achilles or Rama and Odysseus, serves not to make them interchangeable archetypes, but to illuminate how distinct cultural values shape heroic agency, duty (dharma), conflict and resolution.

- **Character and Psychological Depth:** Epic characters can be studied not as prototypes of modern novel characters in a simplistic sense, but complex narrative constructions that allow sustained analysis of motivation, conflict, identity and ethical choice. Arjuna's crisis, Rama's conflicts of duty, Achilles' anger and grief and Odysseus' strategies and return provide contrasting case studies.
- **Moral Dilemmas and Human Relationships:** The epics provide extensive material for examining duty, loyalty, revenge, love, kinship, friendship, power and conflicting obligations. These themes can be compared with later protagonists without erasing historical differences. Such comparison turns literary history into an analytical activity.
- **Heroic Archetypes and Narrative Architecture:** The hero's journey, expansive plotting and the use of stories within stories can serve as comparative entry points. These features do not constitute a single universal formula, but they provide accessible categories through which students can identify recurring narrative strategies.
- **The Linguistic and Comparative Dimension:** The Indo-Greek axis can also be situated within the history of comparative scholarship. Jones's 1786 discourse observed structural affinities between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin; later comparative linguistics developed and refined such ideas. The

research uses this history cautiously: linguistic kinship is not evidence that particular literary plots were directly transmitted from one civilisation to another.

6. STUDENTS FEEDBACK: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The student survey (N = 60) explored interest, familiarity with ancient epics, perceptions of curricular completeness, responses to comparative teaching, learning preferences and difficulties in the existing History of Novel section.

Quantitative results show strong positive interest in comparative learning: 56.9% selected the view that comparing Indian and Greek epic characters with modern novel heroes would make the history of fiction more engaging and relatable. Furthermore, 54.4% selected the view that the "genetic blueprint" concept would make ancient stories feel more modern and relevant.

7. TEACHER FEEDBACK: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The teacher dataset (N = 28) provides key quantitative evidence:

- Curricular Bias: 89.3% (25 of 28 teachers) agreed or strongly agreed that the current syllabus displays a Eurocentric emphasis.
- Framework Support: 78.6% (22 of 28) evaluated an Indo-Greek epic perspective as beneficial or highly beneficial.
- Preferred Integration Model: 57.1% (16 teachers) favoured a brief dedicated introductory section.
- Implementation Challenges: Primary concerns included student difficulty with classical Greek material (46.4%), lack of time (39.3%) and shortage of specialized materials (35.7%).
- Resource Demand: 71.4% (20 of 28) indicated they would be extremely likely to use supplementary teaching materials if provided.

8. PROPOSED PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

- (ii) Begin with the existing textbook chronology so that students retain the prescribed historical sequence.
- (iii) Insert a short comparative bridge titled "Before the Modern Novel: Epic and Early Narrative Foundations."
- (iiii) Use four anchor texts: selected episodes from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Iliad and Odyssey.
- (iiv) Compare one narrative feature at a time: heroism, moral dilemma, character interiority, plot architecture and relationships.
- (iv) Use a one-page comparative chart or character map rather than lengthy additional reading.
- (ivi) Provide teachers with a concise digital slide deck/handbook containing passages, context and prompts.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Retain the existing History of Novel lesson as the chronological foundation.
- Add a concise comparative Indo-Greek introductory section rather than rewriting the entire chapter.
- Explicitly connect Greek Romances, The Tale of Genji and the Indian Scenario to pre-modern narrative foundations.
- Develop teacher-ready supplementary resources to reduce preparation time.
- Evaluate understanding through a combination of objective questions, comparative writing and discussion.

10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is based on one prescribed HSC lesson and a non-probability survey of an available group of HSC learners (N = 60) and English teachers (N = 28). Some question-level student displays contain inconsistent denominators. The survey record does not preserve a standalone age variable or verified

institution-by-institution participant count. Future research should use a prospectively designed multi-institution sample and a controlled classroom intervention.

11. CONCLUSION

The combined evidence supports a nuanced conclusion. The textbook contains valuable historical material and should not be dismissed as wholly Eurocentric. However, teacher feedback strongly indicates a perceived Eurocentric imbalance, while student responses indicate high interest in a more connected narrative genealogy. The most defensible curricular recommendation is therefore expansion and integration rather than replacement. The history of the novel can be taught as a history of literary forms without being reduced to a single geographical chronology. The HSC Class XII lesson already contains valuable references, but these can be pedagogically strengthened by connecting them to a wider comparative account of narrative. The proposed Indo-Greek axis is not a rejection of the European novel, but an invitation to place those developments within a longer and more inclusive history of human storytelling.

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Appendix A. Survey Evidence Summary

Stakeholder Group	Key Metric / Question Item	Statistical Result / Frequency
Faculty (N = 28)	Perceived Eurocentric Bias in Syllabus	89.29% Agree / Strongly Agree (25/28)
Faculty (N = 28)	Interdisciplinary Benefit of Indo-Greek Framework	75.00% Agree (21/28)
Faculty (N = 28)	Willingness to Use Supplementary Tools	71.43% Extremely Likely (20/28)
Faculty (N = 28)	Preferred Integration Model	57.14% Brief dedicated introductory section (16/28)
Students (N = 60)	Familiarity with Selected Ancient Epics	31.67% Very Familiar; 26.67% Somewhat Familiar (58.33% combined)
Students (N = 60)	Interest in Ancient Narrative Connections	78.33% Interested / Extremely

		Interested (47/60)
Students (N = 60)	Engagement via Hero Comparison (Q4)	56.89% positive selection for comparative heroes

Appendix B. Proposed Comparative Analysis Worksheet

Classroom Exercise: Handout for HSC Class XII English Learners

Analytical Metric	Achilles (Iliad)	Arjuna (Mahabharata)	Robinson Crusoe (Modern Novel)
Primary Motivation	Personal honour / Eternal glory ("kleos")	Righteous duty (Dharma) / Order	Individual survival / Economic reason
Central Conflict	Anger against Agamemnon / Mortality	Moral crisis of fighting kin at Kurukshetra	Struggle against nature / Solitude
Social / Destiny Expectations	Heroic code of warrior status	Sacred Kshatriya duty to society	Self-reliance & Enlightenment rationality
Key Trait / Solution	Grief, reconciliation, martial valor	Spiritual clarity (Bhagavad Gita) / Devotion	Pragmatic ingenuity & empirical tools

Critical Thinking Prompt: Compare How Individual Agency, Moral Dilemmas and Cultural Expectations Operate In The Mahabharata, Iliad and Robinson Crusoe. Identify Both Structural Similarities And Distinct Cultural Values.

Appendix C. Suggested Assessment Rubric

Assessment Criteria	Advanced (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Novice (1)
Cross-Cultural Analysis	Deep, evidence-based links across epics & novels.	Clear comparative links with good textual backing.	Limited or superficial cross-cultural links.	Plot summary only; no cross-cultural comparison.
Comparative Reasoning	Nuanced evaluation of similarities & differences.	Relevant comparisons drawn accurately.	Some confusion in comparing traditions.	No meaningful comparative reasoning.
Critical Thinking	Independent, text-based analytical interpretation.	Logical interpretation of core themes.	Basic interpretation with heavy reliance on templates.	Little to no analytical insight.
Communication & Expression	Articulate, precise academic phrasing & clear focus.	Clear expression with minor language errors.	Participates when prompted; basic clarity.	Does not engage or express ideas clearly.