



The Majesty of Hindu Mythology: A Short View

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Abstract: *Mythology is the very important thing of every ancient civilization. It plays an important role of those civilizations in their social, cultural and religious life. Our Hindu myths play a pivotal role in our culture. From very ancient time there are several mythical stories are familiar in our society. But these stories are bearing moral and ethical values which are very significant of our living life.*

Keywords: Mythology- Meaning, Veda-Purana-Dharmashastra, Moral values

‘Everybody lives in myth. This idea disturbs most people. For, conventionally, myth means falsehood. Nobody likes to live in falsehood. Everybody believes they live in truth. But there are many types of truth. Some objective, some subjective. Some logical, some intuitive. Some cultural, some universal. Some are based on evidence; others depend on faith. Myth is the truth that is subjective, intuitive, cultural, and grounded in faith.’ (Pattanaik, Myth = Mithya: Decoding Hindu Mythology).

Introduction:

Mythology plays an important role in human life as it responds to any religious practices and the difference between good and evil. Take any mythology; it will basically be the journey of the protagonist, who struggles a lot to live an ethical life. As a result, he faces situations where she or he differentiates between good and evil and learns many moral values which towards the end help him or her defeat the evil in the story.

Myth- this word came from Greek. Ancient Greek philosophers knew myth as mythos. They distinguished ‘mythos’ from ‘logos.’ From mythos came intuitive narrations, from logos reasonable deliberations. Mythos gave rise to the oracles and the arts. From logos came science and mathematics. Logos explained how the sun rises and how babies are born. It took a man to the moon. But it never explained why. Why does the sun rise? Why is a baby born? Why does man exist on earth? For answers one had to turn to mythos. Mythos

gave purpose, meaning and validation to existence. The Latin meaning of myth is "handing over the narration from one generation to another generation". Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences XI describes myths as tales of the supernatural world which share the characteristics of the religious complex.

A collection of myths, especially one belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition is the dictionary definition of mythology. It is also defined as a set of stories or beliefs about a particular person, institution, or situation, especially when exaggerated or fictitious. We need to understand that mythology is a branch of knowledge that deals with narratives about Goddesses & Gods, demi-gods, and legendary personalities of different civilizations and their cultures. Traditions, folklore and legends are similar to and sometimes part of Mythology.

Since mythology typically incorporates superhuman characters, it is important for us to study them with a "time perspective". We also need to understand the mythology of our respective cultures to bond with it better. The volume of knowledge in the myths not only transmits religious experiences but also projects role models of behavior patterns. They explain patterns of worship and attempt to reconnect modern society to the bygone ages. Modern theories on mythology sum up the branch as that which explains the spiritual potential of individuals and societies. Also, contemporary theorists say that myths explore common archetypes and explain mind patterns, especially in relation to pairs of opposites like good and bad, virtue and vice etc.

Myths are not folklore either. Folklore is set in the modern or post-historical period, whereas myths are set in a time when society had not yet assumed its present form. In folklore, the protagonists are usually human beings or anthropomorphic animals, while in myths; the actors are usually of divine origin. Folklores are not necessarily believed or argued upon but myths are culturally sacred precedents for present actions. Folklore distracts or entertains, and myths connect faith.

Now, after defining mythology and its scope let us give a brief outline of Hindu mythology. Three trends of research in the last two centuries had a direct bearing on the exploration of Hindu mythology. The first one is that of social and anthropological trend research by E B Tyler, Herbert Spencer, Levy Bruhl and Durkheim. These groups carried out research on primitive tribal people and arrived at totemistic, animistic, monistic, solar, lunar and astral theories of the origin of Hindu myths. The second one is the Indological trend or approach. Indologists namely, Max Mullar, J J Mayer and Bergaigna reviewed ancient Hindu religious books particularly Puranas and attached cultural meaning to them. While the last group including Jung, Zimmer and Coomaraswami interpreted Hindu myths from psychological viewpoints

Indian Mythology:

Through generations, different stories in Indian mythology have been passed from generation to generation either by word of mouth or through carefully stored records of the same. These stories, which form the backbone of Indian mythology, are a great medium for people to inculcate interest in Indian Culture in the younger generation, both the natives and

non-natives. Given below are some salient features of Indian mythology.

- The stories are most effective in conveying powerful messages to the readers, thereby influencing their personalities.
- The intention of Indian mythological literature is to convey subtle facts, rules and maxims to guide our daily lives.
- There are usually multiple stories explaining the same fact, occasion or festival with each version being right in its own merit. This is a result of the natural evolution the stories might have gone through in the process of being handed over from generation to generation for centuries.
- Across geographical differences, myths taken from the *Vedas*, *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas* retain their original intent, adding local flavour only in terms of language, imagery etc.

Vedic Mythology:

This section refers to the mythological aspects found in Vedic literature of the very ancient Vedic religion, mostly centred around the hymns of the Ṛgveda. There are four Vedas-Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva. They remain the principal texts of the ancient Indian civilization, venerated till date. It is very fascinating to note that Vedic lore contains numerous elements, which are common to Indo-European mythological traditions, like the mythologies of the Persian, Greek, Roman, Celtic, Germanic and Slavic civilizations. Vedic hymns refer to many deities, often 33, consisting of eight *Vasus*, eleven *Rudhras*, twelve *Ādhiithyas*, and the late Ṛgvedic *Prajāpathi*. These deities belong to the three dimensions of the universe or heavens, the earth, and the intermediate space. Major deities of the Vedic tradition are Indra, Sūrya, Agni, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Mitra, Adhithi, Yama, Soma, Uṣhas, Sarasvati, Pruthvi, and Rudhra. Vedic mythology has in many ways contributed to the evolution and development of later Hinduism and Hindu mythology.

Vedic mythology presents us with an earlier stage in the evolution of beliefs based on the personification of natural phenomena. The foundation on which Vedic mythology rests is still the belief that all objects and phenomena of nature by which man is surrounded are animate and divine and hence can be invoked. Thus, natural phenomena like 'Agni' (fire) 'Savitra' (sun), 'Ushas' (dawn), and 'Indra' (thunderstorms) are invoked to seek their favour in the earliest text called Rigveda.

The psychological significance of Vedic gods seems to be the wonder and amusement of Vedic people who had an agricultural occupation as the main source of survival, hence, rain, earth, sun etc., became an integral aspect of survival and as such, these natural phenomena on which the Hindus depend on heavily evoke admiration, uneasiness and regard. These are, hence, personified and worshipped to assure man and, to some extent, relieve man from the uneasiness of the unpredictability of their occurrence. As such, the earth

is conceived as 'Prithvi' which is not merely an expansion of land but encompasses its vegetation, wealth and prosperity. The same law stands in the case of sun, air and rain also. The Hindu mythopoeic mind has conceptualized them as universal parents. Sun and moon especially acknowledge the signs that guided a traveller from one place to another and rescued him from dangers towards safety and well-being. They liberate life's journey. Besides, a thunderstorm causes great destruction of harvest and death (Yama) that takes life away are equally worshipped in order to overcome man's fear through sublimation or projection on an outward source which is not under the control of anybody. 'Yama' is described as having a court where 'Chitragupta' - his minister keeps all accounts of every man's actions i.e. good or bad actions so the doer can be sent to heaven or hell as per his action after his death. The moral conduct of Yama is called 'Rita' or law of working in justice. It determines the kind of working, the force, power and measure of working of each thing.

Post-Vedic, Puranic and Dharmashastric mythology:

Post – Vedic mythology is popularly known as Hindu mythology. Hindu mythology is the large body of traditional stories or narratives related to Hinduism and this is contained mostly in Sanskrit literature, such as the Sanskrit epics and the Purāṇas. The important features of Hindu Mythology are:

- It is a range of diverse traditions, developed by different sects, people and philosophical schools.
- Far from being confined to one particular region, one can note that this collection is a subset of Nepali and pan-Indian culture.
- It is a collection of works not only marked by different regions but also composed at different time periods.
- On a practical but surprising note, all of these are not necessarily held by all Hindus to be literal accounts of historical events of any era.
- They are taken to have deeper, often symbolic meanings, all of which have been given a complex range of interpretations.

As time passed, the revival of old Vedic thoughts took place in the Hindu mythological scene. The gods personified in the Vedic age turned out to be moral and ethical guidelines of human beings and in this process, certain new gods emerged and certain old ones dissolved. In this emergence and dissolution of gods, 3 gods emerged on the horizon of the Indian scene and they still dominate the Hindu mythological picture. They are: 'Brahma' - the creator, 'Vishnu' - the protector and 'Shiva' - the destroyer. 'Vishnu' in his role of protector is depicted as taking many 'Avataras' or incarnations. These 'Avataras' are playful acts undertaken by 'Vishnu' in the spirit of 'Leela' or 'Maya' in order to save mankind from evil forces from time to time. These 'Avataras' – are the projection of Hindu's ideal life, philosophy and culture. A spectrum of Indian thought including dance, sculpture, music, poetry and other fine arts and philosophical

speculations are interwoven around these 'Avataras'. In these 'Avataras', the basic value of life is brought out i.e., the victory of good over bad through the concept of gods and demons. The demons are depicted as the symbols of ego, pride and delusion. 'Rama' and 'Krishna' - two 'Avataras' of 'Vishnu' still hold good for their ideological, moral, social and spiritual values. Ramayana and Mahabharata two epics still guide the Hindu behavioral pattern. One of the distinct characteristics of Puranic mythology is the fact that gods are not conceptualized as being something divine or mysterious.

Conclusion:

Hindu myths are cornerstones of the Hindu religious and social complex as Hindu religious beliefs and social practices are unintelligible except through the way of their mythology. The *Yama* myth seems to suggest an embedded internal locus of control for an individual's action during his lifetime. On the other hand, it also suggests man's striving to attain permanent calmness in this world. The moral conduct of Yama is called 'Rita' or the law of working in justice. It determines the kind of working, the force, power and measure of working of each thing. Thus, we see that down the centuries, this faith is rooted in the Hindu's ethical consciousness. He obeys rules because nature herself does so and this obedience is at the bottom of the essential cohesion in nature and human society. Morality, then becomes a matter of inner compulsion, 'Nirriti' the Goddess of darkness is also described as the evil spirit that grapples men when they violate Rita. Vedic mythology which knows no metamorphosis and still has so much impact on the Hindu mind is perhaps due to collective memory demanded of it as an indispensable archetypal pattern.

Myths, the world over, have to be critically studied to get a complete understanding of its relevance in the cultural context. Many modern scholars and students dismiss the importance of mythological studies as irrelevant or term it obsolete. But, it can be observed that with the increasing number of avenues available to us, the practice of passing on mythology is very much prevalent today, as never before. It is interesting to note that the audiences for cinemas, theatre-classical, folk & contemporary and even tele-serial are huge in numbers if the story or concept is based on Indian mythology.

Research Through Innovation

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