

MYTH AND REALITY IN INDIAN HINDI DRAMA AND MYTHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of myth is often talked about and is mentioned in the writings of various philosophers as well as great writers throughout the world literature. The Hindi word 'Mithak', being equivalent to the English word myth, has its origin in the Greek word 'mythos' eventually finding its way to Mythology. Myth has become mankind's way to understand, portray and pass down the societal working, which has been facilitated with its access to literary devices and freedom. Unlike most of documented history, it has rarely been shackled by the general standards of academic historicity.

Keywords: *Myth, Hindi Drama, Re-construction, Mythology, Primordial Images.*

Introduction

Myths have always fascinated the creative mind of writers and challenged their critical faculty. This preoccupation with myth— whether to create a new one or to reconstruct the old, can be gauged by understanding the relation between the author's intent behind myths and their functionality as cultural documents within a continually 'shifting' societal reality. In creating a new myth, an author puts his/her own intention to work through the myth visualised, whereas in the case of re-construction of extant myths, the palpable functions embodied within the original myth are questioned, challenged, substituted, negated, reversed or re-focused.

Mythology, as C. J. Jung would prefer to say, is a set of recurring archetypes and patterns which reproduce themselves in an innate, unconscious and universal manner; while an individual myth usually refers to a traditional story or legend, some being or hero or event; with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature.

Mythology is also a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances; and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives.(Abrams, 1957).

Highlighting the inseparable existence of myths in our cultural life, C. J. Jung in his seminal essay, 'The Structure of the Unconscious' believes that the collective unconscious is a universal phenomenon and every human being is blessed with this recurring archetype since his birth.

Jung further defines mythology as primordial stage in his celebrated essay 'The Structure and Dynamics of Psyche' : The collective unconscious, so far as we can say anything about it , appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reasons the myths of all nations are perhaps the real exponents of collective unconscious . In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious. *2

At certain times, wrapped in all glory and glamour of these myths lie some deep rooted "myths" and ideas that are subjected to a lot of controversy, difference in opinions and the question of how the Functioning of our reality is influenced by the beliefs and experiences of these writers. Myth is not an imagination but rather a social construct which has been weaved around by the imagination of the writers who were indeed heavily influenced by their times. The source of myth is related to the primitive folk mind. Myth is a story in which the origin of the universe finds expression in symbolic form to life and death etc. It is through all these myths that the human imagination has found expression.

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These myths carry in them the capacity to evolve with the changing world. With the writers of the modern world critiquing and bringing forth the societal taboos and rotten structures, myths act like a platform to build the new system upon.

Everyone has unanimously accepted the integrity, comprehensiveness and imagination in the concept of myth. It has been accepted by Dr. Ramesh Kuntal as a matter of heart rather than of mind, He considers Myth as a creation of emotion/sentiments and not of contemplation. he credits its evolution to the collective history of humanity rather than man.

Through myth we get knowledge of humanity, human race and human experiences. Similarly, according to Dr. Ramesh Gautam, myths have preserved experiences, ideas, beliefs, traditions truth and experiences from the primitive age to the present day.

Various cultures and languages have different ways to express myth as a concept. since time immemorial Indian myths and drama have been sung, written, and passed on, from the Vedas, the Mahabharat, the Geeta, to the Panchatantra's. These myths and their characters make the tradition and culture of our country, and at times a layout of the society's functioning.

In Hindi literature it is generally referenced with words such as Kalp Katha, Pura Katha etc. Being studied and written by Hindi scholars, notably Dr. Nagendra and Dr. Satyendra, terms such as Kalpakatha and Dharmagatha have been respectively used as a connotation for myth.

The writings in Hindi literature have also been influenced by myth since time immemorial. This influence of myth has been at many instances for example in Prithviraj's Raso or Sufi poets like Jayasi, Manjhan etc. who have expressed faith of the common man in love through their myths in stories and writings. The verses of Surdas in which give the description of the universe; Lilapada, the lifting of the Govardhan Mountain and the slaughter of the demons found in the common folktales, all seem to be inspired by myth.

Even great philosophers such as Aristotle in his poetry, has used the word myth as a plot, narrative and fiction. Among the ancient Acharyas such as Acharya Raja Shekhar who in his poetry on Puranic literature has indirectly given the message of mythical power. He has analysed parts of the Puranic history in the form of Purakhyan which is also known as the mythology of the oral traditions.

Reminding the world of the values that we have inherited, and awareness of the contemporary consciousness lies the portrayal by Indian dramatics.

This has been exemplified in the play 'Ila' written by Prabhakar Shrotiya, based on an Indian mythology, which portrays the deep-rooted patriarchy and the time long practice of gender preference and discrimination. Which perhaps also finds transcendence in the contemporary era.

He also states the importance of how women need to create a platform for their own selves, voice their opinions and to be brave enough to fight off the evils in this society on their own. As he himself voices it, "If you cannot gather the strength to stand up for yourself, no one else can fight that battle for you".

The play 'Ila' portrays, the exploitation of women by the deeply rooted patriarchal practices, beliefs, traditions, injustice towards women as well as treating them as means to their ends. In the play ,which is rooted in Indian mythology, Manu who is a king, does a yajna in hope of having a boy child , but his wife Shraddha gives birth to a girl child. This disappoints Manu and he again goes to the sage Vashisht who again performs the yajna and converts Ila(his then birthed daughter) to Sukshman (a boy child). Shraddha unwillingly let it happen. Sukshman (who has all the feminine traits) growing up is made to follow the structured male practices and then is later married to lord Shramdev's Daughter Sumti.

Further, the author has thrown issues of legitimacy of birth, social stigma towards women, oppressive aspects of the institution of marriage, self-respect of women as also the notions of justice and righteousness into focus, stressing all through the narrative the peripheral, almost pariah like position of his protagonist. In projecting such an alienated predicament, the writer has been able to puncture the myth of calibre and high birth and expose the pliant position of values.^{*1}

We as a society have been fighting for the rights of women, and the emphasis on the importance of having a safe society to be able to survive in has been a major issue. If a woman is not safe even in her own home and family, gets manipulated and abused by her own husband (in this case Manu) as a wife (Shraddha) and even as a daughter (Ila), the existence of such deep rooted patriarchy sets our progress to a very slow pace.

Shraddha, Ila and Sumati are just few of the many women who are victims of female abuse. This play brings forth the reality of how women since time immemorial, have been subjected to systematic oppression and various kind of abuse.

As Evident in the play Shraddha, who despite being a wife and a mother was not in any state allowed to have opinions on the gender of her child. Her wishes were not even acknowledged but were rather seen as an insult to her husband and also as a failure on a woman's part. She is a part of a society where not only the mother's but even the new born girl child's existence is not valued.

She who is titled as the rajmata, which is considered to be the highest post a woman could have at the time, feels shackled and suffocated by the male wants and desires. She is not allowed to behave outside the set societal structure for a woman and is expected to have no opinions and wants of her own, precisely the ones contrary, even in the slightest, her husbands.

A society where she is not able to save her new-born, or protect her form the abuse she is subjected to, she screams, in vain and despair to the heavens and says "Lord, how is it fair that whatever you bless us with is taken away from us in just moments (?), how is it fair that a woman who carries the child cannot have any desire or dreams for her own child (?)"

My child! This world is a place for a man, it revolves around and worships not the ones who give life but the ones who rule it."

This play by Shrotya revolves around the idea that the battle against patriarchal societies cannot be fought by anyone but women. He says that if a woman cannot stand up for her own rights, then no one will let her even take up the space for the battle to begin with.

He also mentions, "Women, the way that your spirits have been crushed and prisoned by the heavy shackles of rotten traditions and beliefs; the only way to break free is to fight for your own self, to realise that freedom is not only for your bodies but also for your mind and soul. It is to fight for your rights and your due respect in the society."

The major issues that have found a voice in this drama are, the paradoxical conditions of women in this society, how tampering and wanting to change the course of nature at our own will is what turns out to be the path of mankind's destruction.

The play also very aptly draws similarities between the characteristics of the protagonists of a presumably ancient era and the traits found in a 21st century man.

Manu, here, can be seen as a figure representing people who for their own selfish reasons can put the whole mankind under risk of dire circumstances without even a flinch.

Vishisht is seen as a figure who is deemed to be a brahmin, having the highest degree of knowledge and moral consciousness but he is tempted by the material pleasures of the world and eventually compromises both his knowledge and power.

The narrator in prelude of the play also stated that 'the rulers are all the same, they want the same power and the people of their society have to obey them. The audacity to manipulate society by changing its politics according to our own will, and the hunger to achieve this power is the major driving force towards weaponizing of religion and cultures, to establish and maintain dominance.

Myth is an universally accepted truth, based on the experiences of sages and deities, telling us the history of an entire spiritual consciousness embedded behind the concept of each culture and society. It Gives the proof of a society being alive. Overall myth is not a mere fantasy but a social reality of its time in the shell of imagination.

Literature in this way uses myth to express, create and emanate a very powerful and influential expression over the society. Shrotya used this as a means to fulfil his end of creating a platform for the viewers to comprehend the current reality of the society while drawing a contrast between our foundations and roots.

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