



## MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT:

*For the Indian populace, history was primarily transmitted through poetry and oral traditions rather than through written records or documentation. Myths frequently incorporate historical figures to reflect and critique contemporary society. Their purpose was to instill morals and establish societal norms, often prioritizing ethical lessons over factual precision. In Kautilya's Arthashastra, specifically in chapter 1.5, the terms itihaas and Purana are mentioned, which translate to 'it was this: Iti-Ha-Asa.' Historical events were recounted in a manner that linked them to the objectives and values of the existing tradition. However, myths often intertwine elements of history with significant imaginative embellishments, rendering them unreliable for accurately tracing historical occurrences. The concept of contemporaneity in literature suggests that facts and fiction are so intricately woven together that they become indistinguishable, resulting in a constructed history. Over time, the role of myth, or purana, evolved beyond mere entertainment. By the middle of the first millennium, the Puranas began to incorporate cosmological and genealogical narratives, marking a shift towards the externalization of history in literary forms, which were meticulously preserved for future study. Societies have long maintained a rich tapestry of traditions. The modern concept of 'History' was introduced to India in 1856 by the Education Commission led by Macaulay. This brought about a colonial interpretation of history that stirred a complex interplay of ideas between myth and history, affecting its significance for Indians. The contrasting spiritual essence of Indian culture and the materialistic foundation of Western culture highlighted a fundamental difference. India is home to a multitude of castes, cultures, traditions, and languages. Nevertheless, the epics serve as a powerful force to unify and harmonize this diverse society, addressing its conflicts and offering a shared foundation of heroic tradition and ethical living. This unity persists, transcending the various diversities present.*

Keywords: mythology, Indian history, historiography



## **INTRODUCTION**

Mythology is the collection of traditional stories, or myths, that a culture uses to explain the world, its origins, and its people's beliefs, often involving gods, heroes, and supernatural events. Literature is related to all disciplines of life. Literature, history and myth are related to and dependent on each other. They together create the identity, culture and ideology of nation. They influence each other. Myth is a symbolic way of representing truth. History relies on facts and events and has many interpretations. To understand the present we need to understand the past. Historians cannot merely account for the facts but have to write like a fiction writer - a narrative. In early societies human beings had myths and these myths form earlier history most of the early history and myths form in oral traditions of those societies for early societies, myth was the medium to express the undiscovered and unknown truth in symbolic form, the other hand, modern societies deliberately created and used myths to influence and shaper events.

## **ORIGINS OF MYTHS**

Myth serves as a foundational element for both literature and history. The earliest mythological narratives emerged as explanations for the unseen forces of nature. Additionally, myths were created through analogical tales that articulated behavioral codes aimed at resolving social conflicts. Both myth and history function as interpretative processes that are expressed through language. Given the open-ended nature of language, it allows for ongoing interpretations of both myth and history. As myths are encoded in language, they exhibit characteristics of literature, thereby enhancing their status. This process arises from the interaction between the unknown and the individual, transforming into a dialogue between the mythic text and the reader. Consequently, myth can be understood as a structured system to which linguistic theories may be applied. Similarly, since myth embodies literary qualities, it is also subject to literary analysis. Myths originating from primitive societies have been transmitted orally across generations, becoming ingrained in collective memory.

As humanity expanded, myths spread geographically, leading to various adaptations and expansions. These myths underwent modifications and amplifications over time. Contemporary novelists often seek to add depth to ancient myths, highlighting their relevance to modern social contexts or demystifying contemporary issues. They utilize myths for purposes such as satire, allusion, parody, and allegory, thereby creating multiple layers of meaning. Myths possess diverse interpretations and can be employed within different



paradigms. By offering fresh perspectives on traditional myths, writers draw upon a wealth of knowledge from various fields to inspire their literary creations. They incorporate mythic structures and patterns to craft narratives that diverge from mere facts, truths, and historical accounts.

### **MYTHS A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In early human societies, myths played a crucial role in shaping their historical narratives, primarily transmitted through oral traditions. For these communities, myths served as a means to convey profound truths that were yet to be understood, often expressed in symbolic language. In contrast, modern societies have intentionally crafted and utilised myths to influence and shape historical events. Over the past two centuries, colonisers and empire builders have propagated specific myths, such as the concepts of the Promised Land and the Chosen People, which have significantly altered the course of history. This influence is evident in pivotal events like the establishment of the state of Israel, the partition of India, and the repatriation of enslaved individuals to Africa. Additionally, there is considerable discourse surrounding the notion that the Aryan invasion is a myth perpetuated by Western philosophers and intellectuals. Myth serves as a narrative of supernatural events, regarded as both true and factual. It outlines the processes of creation and the emergence of various phenomena, establishing behavioural patterns. Consequently, myths provide frameworks for all human actions. Understanding these myths allows individuals to gain insights into the origins of different entities. This comprehension enables the control and manipulation of myths. Importantly, this knowledge is not merely theoretical; it is accompanied by rituals that serve to validate the myths themselves. Every civilisation across the globe possesses its own unique myths and mythologies—stories that are specific to the people within that civilisation. These mythologies serve as a valuable resource for understanding the mysteries that pertain to those communities. As these myths were preserved in the form of narratives, they were passed down through generations. Many of the great civilisations experienced periods of flourishing, during which myths evolved into rituals practiced by the populace, thereby becoming integral to their cultural identity. This evolution gave rise to festivals and various traditions centred around these myths. A significant factor contributing to the endurance of these myths is their incorporation into one of humanity's greatest achievements—literature. Ancient texts from both Greek and Indian cultures are deeply intertwined with mythological themes.



## **MYTHS AND SCIENCE**

Our objective is to interlace the various distinct historical strands of myth into a coherent conceptual tapestry that resonates with contemporary scientific understanding. To achieve this, we must initially acknowledge three interconnected dimensions of the context and nature of 'traditional cultures,' specifically those communities that remain largely unaffected by the influences of Western culture and scientific paradigms. These groups typically do not divide their natural environment, social structures, and systems of knowledge into distinct and isolated parts. Instead, they view everything as part of an interconnected system. Elements such as religion, mythology, economics, subsistence, governance, kinship, and the occurrences and processes of the natural world are intricately linked in complex layers. Consequently, events and processes in the natural world have a significant impact on various facets of society.

## **CONCLUSION**

In India, myths played a key role in deciphering the ancient thought process. They shed light on the geography of the region during antiquity. At times, these myths help us decipher the true extent of the Indus civilisation. There remains a significant amount to discover regarding the theories and methodologies within the emerging field of geomythology. Not every myth lends itself to this type of analysis, and even fewer contain the specific details required to pinpoint actual geological processes, let alone identifiable events such as significant earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and cosmic impacts. Moreover, we should recognize that myths also illuminate various facets of cognition, as well as the historical, social, and literary contexts that shape cultural evolution and human thought.

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