

UNVEILING THE HIDDEN REALM: SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY AND WESTERN LITERATURE

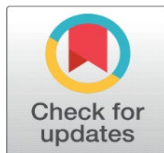
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ABSTRACT

Symbolism in Indian mythology plays a significant role in conveying deeper meanings, moral lessons, and philosophical concepts. It allows for the exploration of complex ideas and the representation of cosmic forces, human traits, and the interplay between gods and mortals. Here are some examples of symbolism in Indian mythology:

Lotus: The lotus flower holds great symbolism in Indian mythology. It represents purity, spiritual enlightenment, and divine beauty. It often appears as a seat or throne for deities, emphasizing their elevated status and connection to the transcendent realm. The unfolding petals of the lotus also symbolize the gradual awakening of consciousness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian mythology is a treasure trove of stories, symbols, and metaphors that have captivated generations. Devdutt Pattanaik, along with several other Indian writers, has delved deep into this rich narrative tradition, uncovering the profound symbolism and metaphorical layers embedded within. This chapter explores the captivating world of Indian mythology through the lens of Devdutt Pattanaik and other prominent Indian writers, shedding light on the symbolic interpretations and metaphorical dimensions that underpin these ancient tales.

2. SYMBOLISM IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Symbolism in Indian mythology plays a significant role in conveying deeper meanings, moral lessons, and philosophical concepts. It allows for the exploration of complex ideas and the representation of cosmic forces, human traits, and the interplay between gods and mortals. Here are some examples of symbolism in Indian mythology:

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Serpent: The serpent is a potent symbol in Indian mythology, often representing primal energy, wisdom, and transformation. The coiled serpent, known as Kundalini, resides within every human being and represents the dormant spiritual energy waiting to be awakened. The serpent is also associated with deities such as Lord Shiva, who wears a serpent around his neck, symbolizing his control over destructive forces.

Elephant: The elephant is a powerful symbol in Indian mythology, particularly associated with Lord Ganesha. The elephant's large size represents strength and stability, while its wisdom and intelligence are revered qualities. Lord Ganesha's elephant head signifies his ability to remove obstacles and bring wisdom and prosperity.

Peacock: The peacock is a symbol of beauty, grace, and immortality in Indian mythology. Its vibrant colours and elegant display of feathers symbolize spiritual awakening and the realization of one's divine potential. The peacock is often associated with the goddess Saraswati, representing wisdom, knowledge, and artistic expression.

Fire: Fire holds deep symbolism in Indian mythology and rituals. It represents purification, transformation, and the divine presence. Agni, the god of fire, is seen as the intermediary between the gods and humans, carrying offerings from the mortal realm to the divine realm. Fire rituals, such as Yajnas, are performed to invoke the divine, purify the environment, and symbolize the transformative power of spiritual practice.

Mount Meru: Mount Meru is a mythical mountain that appears in various Indian epics and scriptures. It symbolizes the cosmic axis and serves as the abode of gods and celestial beings. Mount Meru represents the centre of the universe and the connection between heaven, earth, and the underworld. It symbolizes stability, harmony, and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

These examples are just a glimpse of the rich symbolism found in Indian mythology. Each symbol carries multiple layers of meaning, allowing for profound interpretations and insights into the human experience and the mysteries of the universe.

3. METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Metaphorical representations of cosmic forces in Hindu mythology abound, offering symbolic interpretations of the fundamental aspects of the universe. Here are a few examples:

Creation and Destruction: The cosmic force of creation and destruction is symbolically represented by Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva, respectively. Lord Brahma is depicted as the creator of the universe, while Lord Shiva embodies the force of destruction, paving the way for new beginnings.

Sustenance and Preservation: Lord Vishnu symbolizes the cosmic force of sustenance and preservation. He is often portrayed as the preserver of the universe, maintaining balance and harmony. His various avatars, such as Rama and Krishna, represent different aspects of this cosmic force.

Divine Order and Justice: The concept of Dharma represents the cosmic force of order, righteousness, and justice. It is symbolized by Lord Yama, the god of death and the keeper of cosmic law. Lord Yama ensures that beings are held accountable for their actions and that the universal order is maintained.

Divine Feminine and Creative Energy: The cosmic force of creative energy is often represented by goddesses such as Devi Shakti, and Saraswati. These goddesses symbolize the primordial feminine energy that brings forth creation, knowledge, and transformation.

Time and Cyclical Nature: The cosmic force of time is embodied by Lord Kala Bhairava. Lord Kala Bhairava represents the ever-flowing stream of time, the transient nature of life, and the cyclical patterns of existence.

Harmony and Balance: The cosmic force of harmony and balance is symbolized by Lord Ganesha. Lord Ganesha's unique form, with an elephant head and a human body, represents the harmonious union of divine and human nature. He is revered as the remover of obstacles and the bringer of balance and auspiciousness.

These metaphorical representations of cosmic forces in Hindu mythology offer a way to understand and connect with the profound concepts underlying the universe. They provide symbolic language and narratives that convey deeper truths about the cosmic order, the interplay of energies, and the fundamental forces shaping existence.

Devdutt Pattanaik is a prolific writer and mythologist who has played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between traditional Indian mythology and contemporary interpretations. In *7 Secrets of the Goddess*, Devdutt Pattanaik explores the symbolic nature of various goddesses in Hindu mythology. The book delves into the multifaceted aspects of these deities, unveiling hidden meanings and cultural significance associated with their worship. The key insights from the book include:

Goddess Worship: Devdutt Pattanaik discusses the importance of goddess worship in Hinduism and how it reflects the reverence for feminine power and divinity. He highlights the significance of goddesses as symbols of creativity, fertility, protection, and nurturing qualities.

Archetypal Representations: The book explores how each goddess embodies specific archetypal traits and represents different facets of human experiences. These archetypes are not only found in Hinduism but can also be seen as universal themes that resonate with human emotions and aspirations.

Cultural Context: Pattanaik delves into the cultural context of goddess worship in India, showcasing how various regions and communities have different interpretations and rituals associated with specific goddesses. This highlights the diversity and adaptability of Hindu mythology to local customs and beliefs.

Symbolism and Attributes: The author examines the symbols and attributes associated with each goddess, such as the weapons they wield, the animals they ride, and the objects they hold. These symbols carry deeper meanings and are connected to the goddess's role in the cosmic order.

Philosophical and Psychological Insights: Through the exploration of goddess mythology, Devdutt Pattanaik offers philosophical and psychological insights, showing how the stories of goddesses can provide guidance and understanding in navigating life's challenges and complexities.

Feminine Empowerment: *7 Secrets of the Goddess* emphasizes the empowerment of women through the symbolism of goddesses. The book highlights how goddess worship has been a source of strength and inspiration for women in Indian society.

Overall, *7 Secrets of the Goddess* presents a comprehensive analysis of the symbolic nature of deities in Hindu mythology, shedding light on the profound meanings and cultural significance embedded in these ancient tales. It showcases Devdutt Pattanaik's expertise in interpreting Indian mythology and his ability to unravel the hidden wisdom and insights contained within these narratives.

4. DEVDUTT PATTANAIAK'S INSIGHTS ON SYMBOLISM IN MY GITA

Characters as Symbols: Pattanaik explores the characters in the Bhagavad Gita as symbols of different human traits, dilemmas, and aspects of the self. For example, Arjuna represents the human condition and inner struggles, while Krishna symbolizes the divine, higher consciousness, and the inner guide.

Battle as a Metaphor: The epic Mahabharata, which includes the Bhagavad Gita, is known for its great war, but Pattanaik interprets this battle as an allegory for the internal conflict within each individual. The battlefield represents the mind, where the struggle between right and wrong, duty and desire, takes place.

Teachings as Universal Wisdom: The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are not limited to a specific time or place; they carry universal wisdom. Pattanaik explores how the concepts of Dharma (duty/righteousness) and Karma (action and consequence) resonate with people from various cultures and belief systems.

Yogas as Paths to Liberation: The Gita discusses different paths to spiritual liberation, such as Karma Yoga (the Yoga of selfless action), Bhakti Yoga (the Yoga of devotion), and Gyan Yoga (the Yoga of knowledge). Pattanaik elucidates the symbolism behind these Yogas and how they cater to different temperaments and personalities.

The Dialogue as Inner Conversation: The author portrays the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna as an internal conversation within oneself. He emphasizes that the teachings of the Gita can guide individuals in their personal dilemmas and decision-making processes.

Gita as a Guide to Life: *My Gita* presents the Bhagavad Gita not merely as a religious text but as a practical guide to living a meaningful and fulfilling life. The symbolism and metaphors in the Gita provide insights into understanding one's own strengths, weaknesses, and purpose in life.

Thus, *My Gita* by Devdutt Pattanaik offers a fresh perspective on the Bhagavad Gita, exploring its symbolism and metaphorical dimensions. Through his contemporary interpretation, Pattanaik makes the profound teachings of this

ancient scripture accessible to modern readers, enabling them to connect with the timeless wisdom of Indian mythology and philosophy.

5. INTERPRETING MYTHICAL SYMBOLS: PATTANAİK'S, INDIAN MYTHOLOGY: TALES, SYMBOLS, AND RITUALS FROM THE HEART OF THE SUBCONTINENT

In *Indian Mythology: Tales, Symbols, and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent* by Devdutt Pattanaik, the author offers a comprehensive and insightful exploration of mythical symbols in Indian mythology. Through this book, Pattanaik delves into the rich tapestry of Indian myths, unveiling the hidden meanings and cultural significance of various symbols and rituals. Some key insights regarding the interpretation of mythical symbols in this book are:

Rivers as Sacred and Life-Giving: Rivers hold immense significance in Indian mythology. They are often depicted as goddesses and revered as life-giving and purifying forces. The symbolism of rivers represents the flow of life, continuity, and the cyclical nature of existence.

Mountains as Abodes of the Divine: Mountains are considered sacred and are believed to be the dwelling places of gods and sages. They symbolize stability, spirituality, and the aspiration to reach higher states of consciousness.

Trees and Their Symbolism: Trees are revered in Indian mythology and are often associated with various deities and cosmic forces. The banyan tree, in particular, holds special significance as a symbol of immortality and interconnectedness.

Animals as Archetypal Symbols: Animals play a prominent role in Indian mythology and are often depicted as vehicles of deities or as embodiments of specific traits and energies. Their symbolism represents various aspects of human nature and cosmic forces.

Symbols of Union and Balance: Many mythical symbols in Indian mythology represent the union of opposites, such as the yin-yang concept of balance and harmony. The Ardhanarishvara (half-male, half-female) and Shiva-Shakti representations, for instance, embody the complementary nature of masculine and feminine energies.

Rituals and their Symbolic Significance: Pattanaik explores various rituals and their symbolic meanings in Indian mythology. From fire rituals (yajna) to worship ceremonies (puja), these rituals often embody deeper philosophical concepts and spiritual connections.

Symbolism of the Mandala: Mandalas, intricate geometric patterns often used in religious art and rituals, hold profound symbolic significance in Indian mythology. They represent the cosmic order, wholeness, and the interconnectedness of all existence.

Through this book, Devdutt Pattanaik provides readers with a fascinating journey into the world of mythical symbols in Indian culture. His storytelling prowess and scholarly analysis make the book accessible and engaging for both those familiar with Indian mythology and newcomers seeking to understand the profound wisdom and symbolism woven into these ancient tales. The book offers a valuable resource for anyone interested in the study of world mythology and the layers of meaning within these timeless stories.

6. THE POWER OF METAPHORS IN EPIC NARRATIVES: RAMESH MENON, THE RAMAYANA: A MODERN RETELLING OF THE GREAT INDIAN EPIC

In *The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic* by Ramesh Menon, the power of metaphors in epic narratives is showcased through a contemporary rendition of the timeless Indian epic, the Ramayana. The retelling demonstrates how metaphors enrich the storytelling, making it relevant and resonant with readers across generations. Key insights regarding the power of metaphors in "The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic" include:

Universal Themes: Metaphors in the retelling of the Ramayana allow readers to connect with universal themes and emotions. The characters and events symbolize human virtues and vices, love, duty, sacrifice, loyalty, and the eternal struggle between good and evil.

Emotional Impact: Metaphors evoke strong emotions and empathy in readers. They allow readers to relate to the characters' joys, sorrows, and challenges, making the epic narrative more emotionally engaging and impactful.

Timeless Wisdom: The use of metaphors imparts timeless wisdom and life lessons found in the Ramayana. Readers can apply the teachings and insights from the epic to their own lives and experiences.

Bridging Past and Present: A modern retelling with metaphors helps bridge the gap between the ancient epic and contemporary readers. Metaphorical language helps readers from different cultural backgrounds and time periods understand and appreciate the story's significance.

In The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic, Menon's use of metaphors elevates the storytelling experience, making the epic accessible and relatable to contemporary audiences. The power of metaphors in the retelling enhances the epic's enduring appeal, making it a relevant and cherished narrative for readers of all ages and backgrounds.

While the above explanation gives an account of the symbolism and metaphorically explains the different signs of Hindu Mythology where the females are considered as powerhouse of different energy sources which are indispensable for human existence there are some symbols in modern world which degrades women of present times many folds. For example, the females of Alice Walker's novels like Celie, Shug Avery, Sofia, Tashi and females of Khaled Hosseini; novels like Mariam, Laila, Pari and Mrs. Wahdati. In Afro-American society, the females are only considered as sex-objects which can be used at their disposal. They can be beaten up for minor things and used as a gratifying object. They are the 'things' which can be passed from one owner to the next for further consumption. As slavery was rampant in American society where black served white population and were devoid of any human rights. As in *The Color Purple*, When Sofia denies to work for the mayor's wife she was beaten up and thrown in the jail while she has little kids at home. When she finally serves their home then she was given freedom. Same way, Celie was raped by her step-father and married off to Mr. A without her consent as she is not considered a living being. Even, she herself is alienated to herself and when is beaten up she tells herself, "Celie, you a tree." As for her, tree symbolises a non-living thing which doesn't feel the pain if beaten or cut by others. Some symbolism used in *The Color Purple* are as are:

The Color Purple: Purple is a colour which in itself represents happiness, beauty and divine creation of the universe. It symbolises the blessings that God has bestowed upon us i.e., humankind. It encourages us to be grateful to have got this life and the blessings that have come with its all paraphernalia. We owe it to God to express our thanks and gratitude for giving us this blessed life.

Sewing and quilt making: Sewing of quilt represents the collaborations of females to gather their lives from the pieces, as they are suppressed by the society at large and by their male in particular. It also symbolises creativity as making a quilt requires some expertise to sewing. The females are creative by birth and as the French critic Simone De Beauvoir puts in "Women are not born, rather they are made."

Letters to God: Celie writes letters to God and confides in him. She understands that God listens. It is empowering tool for her. She first writes to God and then to Nettie, her younger sister. Letters are place where she finds solace, it empowers her to vent out everything that is embedded deep in her heart.

Another novel by Alice Walker *Possessing the Secret of Joy* has symbolism in the form of incidents of Tashi's life. It is a sequel story of one of the minor characters of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*.

Female Genital Mutilation: Tashi goes through this procedure as it is the custom of Olinka tribe which she too is part of. It depicts the oppression of customs on female body's private parts. Many times, it leads to death of the female who go for it. This symbolises the psychological and physical wounds this process gives to the female who goes through it.

Of "Possessing": Meaning of "possessing" in itself symbolises the power of reclaiming happiness that females of Olinka tribe is entitled to. Possessing the secret of joy metaphorically gives females the rights to reclaim their lost joy and peace. It symbolises the freedom that comes with the expression of joy.

Likewise, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has several metaphors. The females of Afghanistan have to compromise their freedom of life outside burqa. Under Taliban rule there are several restrictions imposed upon them.

Burqa: One of the restrictions imposed on the females in Taliban rule is to wear burqa before stepping outside and coming in the gaze of another male apart from husband, father, brother and son. It represents both oppression and protection. For the characters Mariam and Laila, it represents oppression and control inflicted on females in the patriarchal society.

The orphanage: In the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* the orphanage represents a safe place for the children away from hunger. It also represents the love and sacrifice of a mother for her child. In the novel Laila's dependence on orphanage symbolises two things. First, she has perception that her child will have food and it will be a safe abode for them. Considering the future of her child, she is the idol of selfishness and material strength.

Mariam Childhood home: Mariam childhood home is Kolba. It's a small rural area away from the hustles of town where her father lives. Since she is an illegitimate child, her father, though loves her, but wants her to be away from the glaring lights of his family and acquaintances. She is a *harami*, for none of her fault, but still needs to live away.

7. CONCLUSION

Exploring Indian mythology through the lens of Devdutt Pattanaik and other Indian writers unravels the profound symbolism and metaphorical depth within these ancient tales. By delving into the interpretations of deities, characters, events, and landscapes, readers gain a deeper understanding of the hidden meanings and universal messages embedded in Indian mythology. "Unveiling the Hidden Realm: Symbolism and Metaphor in Indian Mythology and Western Literature" invites us to appreciate the beauty and wisdom of these narratives, offering new perspectives and insights into the cultural and spiritual heritage of India. While in mythology the females have very position and they powerful and control the universe with their immense capability the females of modern-day America and Afghanistan are finding it difficult to find their feet in the patriarchal society. They are struggling hard to overcome their present challenges and are becoming victorious in their own rights. In each novel various symbolic elements have been used which beautifies the written work of authors like Alice Walker and Khaled Hosseini and encourages the reader to delve deep into the connoted meaning of the text.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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