

Indian Mythology

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Section -A

Indian Mythology

Indian / Hindu mythology refers to the collection of myths associated with Hinduism, derived from various Hindu texts and traditions. These myths are found in sacred texts such as the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas.

Myth is a genre of folklore or theology consisting primarily of narratives that play a fundamental role in a society. In its broadest academic sense, the word myth simply means a traditional story.

Hindu mythology does not often have a consistent, monolithic structure. Vishnu is the main god in Indian mythology. Hindu mythology is not static. It has changed over history, says Devdutt Patraik. In the Rigveda, we are introduced to Indra. In Brahmana literature, we also have the story of Manu saving a small fish from a big fish. In the Mahabharata, for the first time, the concepts of swarga and Naraka are elaborated. In the Ramayana, Indra adores Ram and needs his help to defeat Ravana.

It is in the Puranas that we are introduced to the idea of avatar, the idea of an immortal god taking mortal form on earth. The Puranas also speak of the importance of marriage. In Puranas, the Hindu Trinity was visualised as three couples.

With the rise of Bhakti movement from the 15th century onwards, we find more stories of devotees of Gods thus Hindu mythology has transformed from the Vedas, through the Brahmanas and the epics, to the Puranas and the Bhakti literature.

Hinduism is an Indian religion and dharma, which means way of life. Thus are many texts describing a vast array of Indian mythology and stories about the

Hindu gods . The Mahabharata includes the " Bhagvat Gita" which details a philosophical discussion on the nature of duty that was held between the avator Krishna and Prince Arjuna.

Indian mythology is one of the richest and most diverse mythological traditions in the world. It refers to the collection of myths, legends, and stories found in ancient Indian texts, epics, folklore, and religious traditions. These stories not only reflect spiritual beliefs but also shape cultural practices, moral values, and social structures in Indian society.

- Mythology refers to a body of myths, often linked to religious or cultural traditions, that explain the origin of the universe, gods, humans, and natural phenomena.

Major sources of Indian mythology include:

1. Vedas – the earliest religious texts containing hymns, rituals, and philosophical ideas.
2. Upanishads – spiritual texts emphasizing knowledge and philosophy.
3. Epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata, narrating heroic deeds, dharma, and moral lessons.
4. Puranas – texts filled with myths about gods, creation, cosmology, and genealogies.
5. Folk tales and oral traditions – regional stories, legends, and practices.
6. Classical Sanskrit literature – works like Kalidasa's plays also reflect mythological themes.

Key Themes in Indian Mythology

1. Cosmology and Creation – stories of the origin of the universe, gods, and cosmic order.
2. Concept of Dharma (duty/righteousness) – central to epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata.
3. Struggle between Good and Evil – gods, heroes, and demons symbolizing moral conflicts.
4. Avatars of Vishnu – especially Rama and Krishna, who restore dharma.
5. Role of Women and Goddesses – Shakti, Durga, Kali, and Sita represent power, devotion, and sacrifice.
6. Mythical Beings – Nagas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, and other semi-divine beings.
7. Cycles of Time (Yugas) – Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga, and Kali Yuga.

Importance of Indian Mythology

- Provides a spiritual and moral framework for society.
- Shapes cultural practices, festivals, and rituals.
- Offers ethical lessons through stories of gods, heroes, and sages.
- Strengthens social unity and collective identity.
- Inspires art, literature, dance, music, and theatre in Indian culture.

Influence on Indian Society

- Festivals like Diwali, Holi, and Dussehra are rooted in mythological narratives.
- Family and kinship roles often modeled on mythological figures like Rama-Sita or Shiva-Parvati.
- Myths promote values such as truth, loyalty, devotion, and justice.
- Regional variations of myths integrate local traditions with mainstream Hindu culture.

Modern Relevance of Indian Mythology

- Mythological themes continue to inspire literature, cinema, and popular culture.
- Provides symbolic meaning in contemporary debates on ethics, gender roles, and social justice.
- Acts as a bridge between tradition and modernity.

Indian mythology is not only a collection of ancient stories but also a living tradition that continues to shape Indian identity, spirituality, and culture. For BA students, studying Indian mythology helps in understanding the historical roots of Indian society, its cultural diversity, and the values that continue to guide social life.