

# Ascertaining the Universality of Mankind: A Correlative Exploration of Greek and Indian Myths

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## Abstract

This article emphasizes the mythical motifs of Greek Mythology in contrast with Indian Mythology. Research is formulated on the comparative study of myths from Greece and India to recognize the collective themes, peculiar characteristics and to represent the similitude between these myths. Regions may vary across the globe, but every individual shares the same morals and human instincts. Mythology is constituted by rituals from which the symbols and moral tales arose. Profound deep meaning lies within the mythical texts and it encapsulates the message of human morals and values. Devdutt Pattanaik, an artist and Indian mythologist explores the Greek myths with cheerfulness, exhilaration and full of energy in his work, *Olympus: An Indian Retelling of the Greek Myths*. The supreme beings of Greek, Roman and Hindu mythologies are rendered with magnificent illustrations to clench insight of the Indo- Greek ethos. By juxtaposing two mythologies, one can perceive various mythological systems and understand how diverse cultures establish myths and elucidate virtues and vices of the world to substantiate the universality of mankind.

**Key words:** *mythology, universality, humanity, ethics, motifs, virtues, parables.*

## Introduction

Devdutt Pattanaik, an accomplished story creator and acclaimed Indian mythologist demystifies the famous Indian Myths with his unconventional approaches. He has authored over 50 books and 1000 articles. Most of his writings are concerned with the beautiful comparisons of ancient and contemporary cultures around the world. Among the commendable Europeans and Americans who accomplished the retelling of Indian myths, Pattanaik is appreciated and admired for his retelling of the Greek myths in an Indian perspective. His key area of writing is 'Mythology' and he is an exemplary narrator of animal tales such as

*PASHU: Animal Tales from Hindu Mythology*. This book is exclusively written with mind boggling illustrations which are valued and eagerly devoured by children. He is also praised for his retelling of the two great Indian epics, *Sita: An illustrated retelling of Ramayana* and *Jaya: An illustrated retelling of the Mahabharata*. Pattanaik acts as a consultant to many business firms on leadership and governance. His works are translated into many Indian languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and also into foreign languages like Russian, Polish and Japanese. Other works of this remarkable writer are *The Pregnant King*, *Myth = Mithya: Decoding Hindu Mythology* and the series of *Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik*.

In his publication, *Olympus: An Indian Retelling of the Greek Myths*, Pattanaik turned his enthrallment to the world of Greek myths and made an exemplary analysis of those myths in comparison with Indian mythology. The monotheistic approach of mythology is proposed in an engaging and appealing style. His tales are deep-rooted, lucid and treasured to get hold of readers' attention. This meritorious mythological fiction of Pattanaik is laden with ideal tales, composed in the form of a dialogue to acknowledge the morals of those tales without much discrimination.

#### **A glimpse on *Olympus: An Indian Retelling of the Greek Myths***

This mythological fiction recounts Greek myths and its interrelation with other mythologies. Pattanaik unfolds this book on Greek mythology with his note, 'Shadows and Sunlight' that enriches people with the cultural History of world from Greek city states to the age of globalization. The prologue of this book commences with a conversation between legendary King Alexander the Great and a gymnosophist of ancient India who was experiencing nothingness in his life (Pattanaik 4). The ascetic asks Alexander the Great, to narrate tales of the land he hails and the king who desired to conquer the world, begins with the general overview of how divergent empires grew and fell, finally paving the path to globalization. This book is segregated into ten sections, beginning with a prologue 'The Greek Conquest' and lead by eight chapters namely Zeus, Minos, Oedipus, Heracles, Jason, Helen, Odysseus and Aeneas named after eight prominent Greek Gods or heroes. It closes with an epilogue titled 'The Indian Headshake'. The end of each sub-chapter is marked with a trivia box that substantiates the comparison of Greek and Indian myths. These boxes at the end of each chapter accomplish the true motive of this mythological fiction. Diverse philosophical and cultural themes are also underlying in these mythical tales.

## **Greek and Indian mythology**

In literature, myth is defined as a story narrative of various supreme beings, valued as epitomes of varied moral beliefs. Comparative mythology explores 'mythology' as a worldwide phenomenon and also the way myths have framed the modern pneuma. Greek mythology personates an immense value on the discrete reflection of nature and culture.

Whereas, Indian mythology is depicted in the view of being theological, pragmatic, scientific and moralistic. Thus, the universal idiosyncrasy of Greek and Indian mythology desires for authority, destination, adventure and modern insight. Greek Mythology follows a defined structure while Hindu mythology is inconsistent and acts in accordance with monolithic structure.

### **Comparative mythology: Distinctive nature of mythical motifs**

Mythologies don't edify good and evil but they manifest ways of life to humankind. The origination of Greeks was chaos and intention of their world was a progress to order. Likewise, not a thing, neither chaos nor order is persistent in Indian mythology. All incidents follow a cyclical regularity (Pattanaik 10). The race of mankind is a picture of intentions, instincts and illusions of diversified human folk influencing their moral and ethical thinking. It is perceived through the power of man to appreciate, acknowledge and empathize fellow beings worldwide. To appreciate the individual differences and to seek truth, one must acquire and ascertain the varied themes of Indo Greek mythologies.

### **Benevolence**

With reference to Lord Confucius, Benevolence is the characteristic element of humanity. Penelope and Urmila of Greek and Indian mythologies, portray the common theme of painful detachment from their consorts. Urmila yearns for her love, Lakshman who followed his brother Ram in forest exile. Correspondingly, Penelope was a miserable woman, detached from her partner Odysseus who contended in the Trojan war and returned home after a decade. Both Penelope and Urmila stayed true to their partners and they are epitomes of fidelity and trustworthiness.

Sibling relationships are so divine and they are angelic beings on earth. They make sure to protect, safe guard and act as a support system for their elder or younger sibling. In both Greek and Indian mythologies, brothers are regarded as protectors for their younger sisters. Cadmus, a prominent Greek hero, daringly looked forth for his sister Europa. Similarly, Dhrishtadyumna of Mahabharata showered so much love on his sister and ensured the welfare of his sister Draupadi all the time.

The significance of actual love is realized by the tale of Savitri who rehabilitates her husband Satyavan from netherworld. Quest to bring back their deceased lover is seen as a key theme in both Greek and Indian mythologies. Love is undefined eternal feeling arousing out of deep affection for another soul. It encompasses divergent relationships like parental love, siblings love, deep friendship, romantic love, passionate love, self-love, homosexual love, heterosexual love and love for mankind.

### **Power and justice**

Indra and Zeus are proclaimed as ‘Gods of Gods’ by dethroning their own fathers. They both are Gods of rain, lightening, thunder and both have the potency to control the whole universe. These gods are also ascertained for their virility and amorous desire for the significant other. Indra and Zeus, assist others in need and they are personified figures of justice. Traits of these Gods are associated with power, justice and wisdom which are coextensive with the universal characteristics of human race.

In concordance with Devdutt Pattanaik’s *Olympus: An Indian Retelling of the Greek Myths*, securing wives by abducting them is called ‘rakshasa- vivah’ and by the rape is called ‘pisacha- vivah’ (Pattanaik 72). The rights of women are universally omitted and this draws forth ferocity against the womankind through rape and sexual slavery. Unconstrained lust due to immodesty and anxiety is one of the major issues of the world and it leads to destruction.

Dignity and justice are the promise of equity and diversity for each and every being on earth. Hades of Greek and Yama of Indian mythology, torture and inflict pain on people for a longer period. They are widely known as tormentors and pass judgement to each soul, according to their good deeds. For every single human being, justice is the promise of heterogeneity and balance of power.

### **Deep wisdom**

Every earthly being strives to prefigure future that empowers them to configure remarkable civilizations. Prometheus, a wise humanitarian of Greek mythology, forecasts future. Likewise, through the idea of Jyotisha-shastra, Bhrigu, popularly known as ‘The Father of Fortune’ in Indian mythology predicts destiny. Prometheus and Bhrigu took genuine attempts and fought a good fight for the outgrowth of mankind. They are wise, intelligent and selfless men regarded superior to Gods for enlarging the livelihood of human folks. These wise men fell prey to God’s enrage and they were tormented. But their unselfish and fearless act, gave a new birth to humankind and made them perceive superiority on earth.

## **Pride and vanity**

The tale of Icarus and Daedalus in Greek mythology is analogous to the myth of Jadayu and Sampati from Ramayana in Indian mythology. Icarus and Sampati were proud puerile men, frenzied and wanted to fly high above the sky. They arrived near the sun and saw their waxen wings melting. This conduct of instantaneous satisfaction led to their catastrophic end. Through this myth, we can assume that a right kind of pride is virtuous and severe arrogance is wild which even leads to the demolition of humankind.

## **Manliness**

“True heroism is sober, and very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost” (Ashe). Bhima is an archetypal image of human weaknesses and strength in Indian mythology. He protects his clan from all the misfortunes and becomes a man of mark, by saving humankind at the moment of crisis. Comparably, Theseus is the formulating hero who overwhelmed power for the establishment of Olympian order. Through their act of manliness, Bhima and Theseus are regarded as actual heroes and their act of courageousness has established democracy around the globe.

## **Gender identity**

Gender can be described in divergent ways but traditional societies presume that gender is either male or female. A male-female binary is evinced in most of the communities and it is also recognized as a familiar theme in Greek and Indian mythology. In both mythologies, many human beings have developed from a primal androgynous being. Hermaphroditus, a young Greek God was an androgynous being comprising the characteristics of both male and female. Hermaphroditus can be associated with Ardhanarishvara, half man and half woman of the Indian *Shiva Purana*. Through the myth of Hermaphroditus and Ardhanarishvara it is inferred that men and women are two inseparable beings and they also deduce the equality of two opposite sexes in the universe.

The complexity of gender is more widely acknowledged these days and accepted as an integral part of humankind. Literature has never failed to respect gender identities and it has always portrayed the androgyne beings in an optimistic manner. This led to the deeper understanding of gender issues among human communities. Accepting the existence of bisexual beings in the society is not yet taken into account as a widespread phenomenon but a gradual change is felt among people as most of them are understandable and knowledgeable beings on gender complexities.

## Conclusion

Human beings possess distinctive personality traits. They are peculiar and diversified creatures subject to numerous factors on earth. They differ biologically by their genes which decides upon the gender of each human being. Contemplating on the sociological factor, living souls differ in their culture, class, caste, creed and religion. The psychological factors owe to change in each individuals' perception, attitude, behavior, beliefs and personality. These factors are a reflection of their demeanour in the society. Language, expression and manner of speaking is unlike for every single person and these linguistic factors are most important for humankind to communicate, interact and to express their viewpoints to fellow beings. Irrespective of all differences they behold, the humaneness in each soul is indestructible and everlasting.

On collating Greek and Indian mythical motifs, it is perceived that the religion we trust, idols we revere, power we possess and the rituals we practice may differ among each individual and it can also change over a length of time based on human perception. But morals and ethical values are much the same for every human soul and it governs the society, irrespective of all dissimilarities that appeal to mankind. In general, God is elucidated as the supreme being of universe to be worshipped, in accordance with diverse devout practices. On examining the idiosyncrasy of Indo-Greek Gods, one can arrive at a conclusion that God is an immanent truth originated out of humanity and diversified forms of God are embodied in the moral and spiritual insight of each human being. These universal human values also assist in recognising the human deeds that are coincident with our fellow beings. The mythical characters of both mythologies recount people that virtues and vices are integrated and combined by ethical values to ascertain the universality of mankind.



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