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MAGICAL INDIAN MYTHS: ANSWER TO MYTHOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper entitled “Magical Indian Myths: Answer to mythological questions” analyzes the mystery of Indian mythology unwrapped for the universal in Anita Nair’s Magical Indian Myths, a treasure trove of myths from India. Nair does not take myths in their entirety instead takes them only in parts that are useful to her and the rest she supplements with her imagination. Although in Indian context myths are related to religion, she is only interested in the mythical side of it. It is a collection of ancient India’s myths and legends belonging to Indian culture which answers all the questions about Indian mythology such as why Rahu and Ketu are held responsible for eclipses or why the Ganga is also called Bhagirathi. Vivid and rich descriptions brings alive a fantastic world of gods and demons in which Nair had recounted each story with such elegance that the characters seem to come breathing and it will not match oral version of the mythical tales. Stories in the Indian myth changed its form and acuity and instead of deviating and discovering some complicated issues, found to be simple and interesting. Nair perceives each story in her own way and awards a different meaning. The Moon and Yama the famous mythical characters are described in a special way apart from the common perception that the Moon is a maiden and Yama the much-feared god of death. Unlike other writers, Anita Nair doesn’t digress to explore issues of higher consequence instead spins her tales with elegance telling the reader how Bali lost his kingdom and why Ganga came to earth. It showcases the most enchanting and magical stories from Indian mythology with own colored illustrations.

Key Words: purana, Ganesha, Ganga

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INTRODUCTION

Purana is that which renews the old and is almost always mentioned along with Itihasa- the history. The Puranas illustrate and explain the truth of the Vedas which are essentially archetypal poetry of high literary value. They are mythical in nature and their language is symbolic. Being mythical, they have multiple meanings. Popular legends or mythological stories expound the fundamental, philosophical and religious truths. Thus, Itihasa placed at the core of a narrative makes a story seem credible. Myths are traditional stories and they often exhibit characteristics of other sorts of traditional tales, most notably folktales. They often

present themselves as explanations of how nature works or how a certain benefit or ill come about. Authors take up mythology and visualize it the way they want to, and interpret it to create beautiful stories and look at mythology from different perspectives. An explicit attempt to retell the purana in the novel form is Anita Nair's 'Magical Indian Myths'. The novel allows an insight into the complex construction of mythology; it focuses on the mystery of Indian mythology unwrapped for the readers.

Answers to some, if not all mythological questions

Anita Nair's 'Magical Indian Myths' is a collection of ancient India's myths and legends belonging to Indian culture which answers the questions about Indian mythology. India has the greatest living oral narrative tradition in the world. Whenever people look at Lingam, some common questions rise in their minds such as what is it? How is it born? Why people worship this? Even though Bhagavatha Purana answers these questions, children do not go through such a complex work. Even if they go through it, they will not understand the story due to its complexity. But as Nair knows its complexity as well as the mindset of the people, she presents the whole story of Linga in twenty lines which is further illustrated by Atanu Roy. Nair has avoided the stereotype and interpreted each story as only a story without any glorification or religious connotations. 'How Ganesha Got His Elephant Head' is the twenty first story in the book which unravels few mysteries related with Ganesha's birth, Ganesha's elephant head? and his only tusk. As all of us know cock crows at dawn every morning, but do not know the reason behind that. Nair has her own explanation to this in the 45th story 'Why the Cock Crows in the Morning', which brings Yama(the god of death), Surya(Yama's father) and Chhaya(hand maid) into the picture and it was Surya who appointed the cock in the absence of Surya, the father, to pick out the worms from the legs of Yama and relieve the pain which was a result of a curse. As a whole, *Magical Indian Myths* answers most of the questions raised in the curious minds about Rahu, Ketu, Eclipses etc. Except three stories in the book all other titles of the stories begin with W/H questions, such as Why the Cock crows in the Morning, How the Sun Became Less Fierce? etc and all these stories answer the questions raised in the beginning.

Nair's interpretation of myths

Historical fiction and mythology is a broad genre with scope for some brilliant writing. Nair does not take myths in their entirety, instead takes them only in parts that are useful to her and the rest she supplements with her imagination. She is not interested in the religious part of myths but interested only in the mythical side of it. Although in the Indian context myths are related to religion, she is only interested in the mythical side of it. Stories in the *Magical Indian Myth* changed its form and acuity and instead of deviating and discovering some complicated issues, found to be simple and interesting. Nair perceives each story in her own way and awards a different meaning. Unlike other writers, Anita Nair doesn't digress to explore issues of higher consequence instead spins her tales with elegance.

The fourth story entitled 'The Churning of the Cosmic Ocean' begins with the purpose behind the act. According to Nair it was to retrieve the precious and irreplaceable. According to Bhagavata, the outcome of the churning of Ksheerasagara is Halahalam (terribly destructive poison), Amrita (nectar) with Dhanvantari (physician of Gods), Lakshmi (Goddess of Riches), Jyestha (Goddess of Poverty), Chandra (the Moon), a white elephant named Airavata, a horse named Uchchairava, Kalpavriksha (the tree that yields whatever one desires) Kamadhenu(cow of plenty), Sura(the goddess of wine), Parijatha tree, Rambha and Moon. But Nair continues and further states the reason for eclipse too.

In the story 'How Ganesha Got His Elephant Head,' Nair starts the story from the birth of Ganesha and narrates how he got the elephant head and also how he lost one of his tusks. As found in Ganesha Purana, Parvati created Ganesha, taking the turmeric paste (for bathing) from her body and breathing life into it. But Nair made it more interesting by creating Ganesha by the peeled – off paste of sandalwood and cream. The purpose of the creation of the little man by Parvati was just to amuse her and as she liked the handiwork she breathed life into it. Nair here by interpreting in her own way and trying to unravel the mystery of complex myth found it to be pleasurable. When Ganesha lost his head, the attendants went in search of the head of the first living creature they encountered. As the first creature they saw was the tusker they brought his head to Shiva. But according to Shiv Purana, Shiva realizing his mistake, agreed to Parvati's conditions and sent Brahma

out with orders to bring back the head of the first creature he crosses that is sleeping with its head facing north. The language, style and the tone are very simple and easy to understand. Importance to direction – north, in Shiva Purana leads to complex issue of wisdom of Ganesha. Whereas Nair’s version of story is so simple that it does not lead to another question, instead answers some.

Conclusion

The Puranas are the strange combination of mythology and histories freely inter mixed and they form the smriti tradition. They are essentially narrative accounts of various gods, sages and ancient kings of immense repute. They also describe the process of creation and the struggle between the good and evil forces of the universe. Though for a student of religion they offer profound information and insight into the background of Hindu religion, for the common reader they do not. Anita Nair’s *Magical Indian Myths* recounts each story with such elegance that the characters seem breathing, though she deviates from the oral version of the mythical tales. Nair’s description of the famous mythical characters such as the Moon and Yama are different from the common perception that the Moon is a maiden and Yama the much-feared god of death. It showcases the most enchanting and magical stories from Indian mythology with matching colored illustrations. Vivid and rich descriptions bring alive a fantastic world of gods and demons, which fulfils and feeds the needs of every young and growing child.

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