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SYMBOLISM IN INDIAN LITERATURE AS A SOURCE OF HINDUISM

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ABSTRACT

It has been proclaimed that the most elevated form of literature can be found in the Indian Hindu epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Hinduism as broad as a culture or way of living and as narrow as a religious identity has found its way to generations through literature. Literature, especially Indian, has its crux implanted in the Hindu beliefs and ideas as the Indian way of life is the Hindu way. The essay basically focuses on the way Hinduism has crept into literary writings. It brings out the ways in which Hindu beliefs and ideas find their everlasting journey to nourish literature and humans on the ideal and the good. Symbolic writings have been a source of inspiration for many critics and in fact more than the writers, the critics have helped people understand the Hindu system through their interpretation of the various connotations and denotations. The work is an exploration of the ways in which the basic ideas and beliefs of Hinduism have been brought out through literature, eventually proving that Hinduism may be understood through Indian literature.

Key words: Indian writing, Hinduism, Symbolism, Spirituality

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INDIAN LITERATURE

Literature from India is believed to be the oldest in the world and has contributed immensely to the world of literature. A variety of Indian languages have nourished Literature in India through various genres. Its rich tradition encompasses drama, poetry, novel, songs, criticism and more significantly, writings on social and spiritual life, administration and politics, astronomy and astrology, law, medicine, grammar, science, architecture, sex etc. which are quite relevant in this modern era. The basis of all this can be found in the *Puranas* and folktales which have been passed down through generations. The mystery underlying the basic Indian literature, the Vedas is still a question. It may sound irrational to say that the basic Indian writing the Vedas, has no beginning and no end. They are contributions by different people at different times from an unidentifiable source of energy. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relations

between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.”¹

The basic features one can see from the history of Indian writings are: it was of oral tradition generally sung or recited (the written tradition started from the 16th century and Sanskrit added strength to it), they are dominated by the Hindu culture, the earliest form of it being religious and culturally rooted, and include the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas, the Upanishads, epics and mythological writings and Sanskrit was the medium². The earliest works may be said to belong to the Vedic Sanskrit Era. This was followed by Classical Sanskrit Era forming the development of retelling of stories and other non-literary works. Many saints contributed to Indian writing in the medieval period and the *bhakti* (devotion) tradition was the main trend. It was a kind of devotional and philosophical era. Finally, the modern period is focusing more on the Indian culture and the interpretation of texts written in earlier eras. There is also a growing trend of the intertwining of western and eastern idealism and criticisms.

Hinduism as a religion vs. Hinduism as a culture

The dilemma of whether Hinduism is a religion or a culture stems from the fact that it does not own a particular origin, founder, doctrine, practice or a scripture. It is a conglomeration of various traditions, philosophies, beliefs, scriptures, epics, rituals etc. “It is timeless and based on collection of sacred texts known, as a whole, as Sanatana Dharma - The Eternal Teaching or The Eternal Law or The Eternal Way”³. Those who followed this Sanatana Dharma later got identified as Hindus based on the place of origin. “This system is typically divided into four major sects: Shaiva (devotees of the god Shiva), Vaishnava (devotees of the god Vishnu), Shakta (devotees of the goddess), and Smarta (those who understand the ultimate form of the divine to be abstract and all encompassing, Brahman).”⁴ The main source of Hinduism is the Vedas meaning ‘knowledge’. “These scriptures do not mention the word 'Hindu' but many scriptures discuss dharma, which can be rendered as 'code of conduct', 'law', or 'duty'”⁵. It is a unique faith with fibered laws that govern actions of human beings stating what is right and what is wrong, in other words, *dharma* and *adharma*. Therefore, scholars consider it as a misinterpretation when it is referred to as a religion rather than as a way of life. It gives one freedom to choose one's path: whether to follow polytheism or monotheism. There is freedom of choice.

Hindu ideas prominent in Indian writing

Indian literature virtually encompasses the whole of India and all its aspects both symbolically and realistically⁶. From the prehistoric times, Indian writing has shown a tremendous influence of mythology and folklore and as a result, many of the ideas and themes are just a reflection of those. Generally speaking, predominant Hindu ideas in literature can be classified into religious ideas, spiritual ideas, cultural ideas, romantic ideas and philosophical ideas. Hence, there is diversity in the ideas expressed from the Vedic age to the medieval age to the modern age. Most of these ideas get into the works either in the “form of symbols or in the form of implicit references”⁷ that are to be traced and studied in relation to their sources for the full essence of the text to

¹“Paper on Hinduism.” *Swami Vivekananda Works and Collections*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.swamivivekananda.org.in/main/lectures/parliament-of-religions/paper-on-hinduism/>>.

²“Indian Literature.” *India Facts- Indian Literature*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.webindia123.com/india/literature/literature.htm>>.

³“Hinduism.” *Hinduism Origins, Hinduism History, Hinduism Beliefs*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism.html>>.

⁴“Hinduism.” *Hinduism Origins, Hinduism History, Hinduism Beliefs*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Hinduism.html>>.

⁵“Introduction to Hinduism.” *BBC News*. BBC, 29 Sept. 2009. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/ata glance/glance.shtml>>.

⁶“Mythological Themes in Indian Literature.” *Mythological Themes in Indian Literature*. N.p., 23 Nov. 2013. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <http://www.indianetzone.com/39/mythological_themes_indian_literature.htm>.

⁷“Mythological Themes in Indian Literature.” *Mythological Themes in Indian Literature*. N.p., 23 Nov. 2013. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <http://www.indianetzone.com/39/mythological_themes_indian_literature.htm>.

be comprehended. Lotus⁸ is one common symbol used in Indian writings. It stands for the supreme reality, the muse of learning, beauty and non-attachment that has references in the philosophical writings of Hindu scriptures. From these same sources, ideas like *purushartha*, righteousness, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*, reincarnation, soul, detachment find their place in modern writings through symbolisms.

Mythological characters and actions like *pandavas*, *kauravas*, gods and goddesses, the kurukshethra war, the game of dice, *aswamedhayagam*, caste system, nature worship, illusion, pantheism, and incarnations of Vishnu etc. are embedded in the writings for readers to understand the relationship with the eternal. Some of the common symbols that are used throughout the ages are different trees, images of gods, fire, snake, water, mountains especially the Himalayas, sky, temple, sword etc. The main ideas which are symbolized are especially gods (polytheism) being for those who need a concrete image (elements of Nature) and the formless One for those who have total faith. The various social practices, the four stages (*ashrams*) in a man's life and the above-mentioned elements give a direct connection to the sources of Hinduism.

Two types of symbolism in Indian Literature related to Hinduism

The current state of declining faith is the failure on the part of man to understand the symbolism hidden behind the traditions, beliefs and ideals and forms of worship. People find it difficult to unravel the meanings hidden in the symbolisms used in the works and thus fail in the comprehending the true spirit of Hinduism. A close study of Indian literature can reveal the fact that one can understand Hinduism not only from the Hindu scriptures that form part of the Vedas – “which are the repository of the highest philosophical and religious truths”⁹ - but also from the popular literature that include epics, puranas, plays and poetry which have veiled, using symbols and other literary devices, the essence of Hinduism. The writers of these ages were quite sure that unless put in the form of stories and songs, common man will not be able to comprehend the Vedas. Symbols become an effective medium to make man understand the spiritual and philosophical ideals.

“For one person who can study and understand the highly philosophical truths in their nakedness, there are a thousand who study them clothed in the popular form of stories, and that is how these truths have continued to influence and inspire the masses, generation after generation. And the fact that the wisdom and knowledge have survived and have been effective in keeping alive spiritual traditions and conceptions shows the wisdom of our Rishis (sages) who devised this popular method of spreading and transmitting ideal of great value to humanity. If our spiritual culture is to survive it is necessary that these truths and traditions be kept alive among the people as a whole and not be confined among a few erudite scholars.”¹⁰

Thus symbolism became a medium to make man understand the ideals. There are two ways in which Hindu ideas are symbolized - objects standing for some idea and practices or rituals standing for some idea. However, there are various levels at which these symbols can be interpreted to understand the Hindu ideals as is suggested by “It must be re-asserted that it is due to the archetypal element that symbols could be understood at various levels. The *Brahmanas* give the three-fold meaning of a ritual. First is the cosmological one, the second refers to an individual's relationship with others in the family, the society or the political set-up, while the third points to the individual's physiological, psychological, intellectual and spiritual levels of existence.”¹¹

Analysis of selected literary writings

Vedas [Sanskrit – English] (BC)

⁸Raghu. "Lotus – the National Flower of India." *News.N.p.*, 15 Aug. 2012. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/lotus-the-national-flower-of%20india/article3774100.ece>>.

⁹Taimni, I. K. "Chapter 3: General Principles of Hindu Symbolism." *An Introduction to Hindu Symbolism*. Madras: Theosophical Pub. House, 1980. N. pag. Print.

¹⁰Taimni, I. K. "Chapter 3: General Principles of Hindu Symbolism." *An Introduction to Hindu Symbolism*. Madras: Theosophical Pub. House, 1980. N. pag. Print.

¹¹Choudhuri, Usha. "Vedic Ritual and Its Symbolism." *Vedic Ritual and Its Symbolism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_choud_ritual_frameset.htm>.

The basic purpose of Vedic literature is to make man understand his own purpose, reality and the ways to merge with the supreme soul. It is a substance for man to guide himself to get back to his place of origin. However, the intelligence with which those are written are far beyond the reach of common man today and the symbols used stand for abstract philosophical ideas. Sages who wrote Vedic hymns used symbolism for the very reason that the highest of philosophy cannot be explained spiritually to the layman as it is beyond his cognitive capacity but when used as symbols he will be able to relate to it and understand the essence of the doctrine. For example, "If thoughts are water droplets, then Mind is a Spring-water, and intellect is the flowing stream joining a mighty river of Awareness, which finally merges into the Ocean of Consciousness. The sages called this Ocean of Consciousness as Brahman in Sanskrit."¹² Sanathana dharma is the spirit of Hinduism and this has been dealt with in the Vedas. Vedic texts show that both mythology and rituals are represented in symbolic form. Since both are interdependent, understanding one without the other will not serve the purpose. "Just as a myth 'is not merely a story told but a reality lived', similarly the ritual also embodies the lived human experience as it symbolises the Creative Synchronisation between organism and rhythms of its environment."¹³

In his work, *The Secret of Vedas*, Aurobindo talks about the symbols used and what it actually conveys. He says,

"The vedic deities are not only the forces of nature, but also forces that exist in the physical body and help the individual in his spiritual progress to overcome certain impediments. The Vedic ritual has an inner corresponding ritual, a sacrifice, an attempt to elevate the status of an ordinary man to a cosmic man. A ritual at the inner level, agni (fire) is the divine spark in man, the inner soul. The ghee or the clarified butter that is offered to him is the mind. The sacrificial food or annam, consisting of grains, seeds etc. stands for the physical body which is but an altered state of annam or food only. Once the divine spark-agni-is invoked, he wakes up the latent energies or divine powers hidden in man – gods and goddesses – to share the fruits of the sacrifice and assist the individual in his spiritual awakening, transformation, purification and evolution."¹⁴

In his book *Symbolism in Vedas and Its Conceptualisation*, Karel Werner writes

"Max Muller explained the symbolic meaning of goddess Aditi mentioned in Vedic hymns as not-bound – boundless, infinite. To the worshippers she is the symbol of freedom from the bondage of sin and guilt and suffering. Aditi is the expression of man's mystical experiences of the beyond and of the transcendent. Macdonell explained Aditi as a personification of an abstract idea of freedom."¹⁵

All interpretations lead to the basic Hindu idea of liberation through detachment. Different Yantras one see in Vedic rituals is another kind of symbolism. It is a symbolization of communication between man, the microcosm and the supreme, the macrocosm. According to Ananda K Coomarswamy

"Vedic rituals are Mysterium and Mimus, mysteries and imitations; what anthropologists describe empirically as "sympathetic magic" is a metaphysical operation, an enchantment and a conjuration, not a religious, devotional service or "prayer". So the myth and the ritual are not to be understood only in their physical sense, as the reference of the indirect term is much wider than that of the direct term, namely, the many conceivable signs of or substitutes for the operating but unseen referent to the direct term specifies only one."¹⁶

¹²"Symbolism in Vedas." *Uni5 Sakthi Community*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.

<<http://uni5.co/index.php/en/175-uni5-community/uni5-self-awareness/vedas-sakthi/vedic-symbolism.html>>.

¹³Choudhuri, Usha. "Vedic Ritual and Its Symbolism." *Vedic Ritual and Its Symbolism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_choud_ritual_frameset.htm>.

¹⁴Jayaram, V. "Symbolic Significance of the Vedic Gods and Goddesses." *Symbolic Significance of The Vedic Gods and Goddesses*. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/vedicdeities.asp>>.

¹⁵Werner, Karel. "Symbolism in the Vedas and Its Conceptualisation." *Numen* 24.3 (1977): 223-41. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3269600?sid=21105054048331&uid=60&uid=387070811&uid=3&uid=3738256&uid=2>>.

¹⁶Choudhuri, Usha. "Vedic Ritual and Its Symbolism." *Vedic Ritual and Its Symbolism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_choud_ritual_frameset.htm>.

Ramayana [Sanskrit - English] – Valmiki (BC)

As a literary work *Ramayana* has a highly elevated status in the world of literature. Once read as a literary piece it is a well-crafted story. But according to critics that is not the purpose of the text. The hidden lessons are much more significant to mankind than the surface meanings. According to Swami SathyanandaSaraswathiTiruvadikal,

“the lower status of human mind is gradually lifted to the higher status of spiritual order for which the qualities of the human mind are transformed into the characters of Ramayana. The Heroes and heroines wear significance as symbols to suggest the qualities of the human mind. The viles and virtues are discussed through this brilliant technique. The viles are defeated and virtues are promoted. The negative forces are discouraged and positive values are encouraged.”¹⁷

However, spiritual interpretation given to a text book shows its quality, and the esoteric explanation given by critics shows how it makes one understand Hinduism. In the context of Hinduism and its doctrines, the objects and practices in *Ramayana* are mere symbolization of its abstract ideas. The title itself is the perfect example.

According to the ideas given by various critics and philosophers each of the characters in *Ramayana* stands for Hindu ideals. For example, Dasharata is ten senses (5 *karmedriyas* and 5 *njanedriyas*), Kausalya is devotion or *satvaguna*, Kaikeyi is attachment or *tamoguna*, Sumitra is detachment or *rajoguna*. Ram is the embodiment of wisdom or the power of soul, Bharata is discrimination or the power of body, Lakshmana is renunciation or the power of will and Shathrugna is thought or the power of action. Sage Vashista is the symbol of Vedic knowledge. The bow of Shiva is pride and Sita is devotion. When these symbols are related to the actions taking place in the plot, the ideas one can perceive are more or less the same as those that are mentioned in the Sanathana dharma. Dasharatha gets influenced by Kaikeyi and sends Rama for exile and made Bharata the Prince. Symbolically, the senses influenced by *tamoguna* (ignorance) give preference to body over the soul and the same leads to his fall. The soul abandons the material world of kingship and moves to the forest, a symbol of ultimate wisdom. The exile to the forest is the journey of the soul with devotion and renunciation. It reaches the Tamasa River and crossing it is the acquisition of the knowledge of the *brahman* but not ultimate union. It reaches the Triveni Sangam which is the meeting point of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi, symbols of *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Sushumna* otherwise called the mind, ego and intellect. It stays at *Panchavadi*- the abode of the five senses - and the ego in it abducts devotion. The soul with the help of *prana* or life (symbolized by Hanuman (son of wind)) and renunciation kill ego, and unites with devotion to reach the cherished union with the supreme. Thus Ramayana is the Journey of the soul – “Ramayan is ram=atman (soul) + ayan =progress (journey)”¹⁸.

Interpretations are numerous. Another example is from the discourse given by Sathya Sai Baba. To quote his words,

“The four Vedas came in the form of the four brothers to the abode of Dasaratha and sported there. Rama was Rig Veda and Lakshmana, who closely followed Rama, was Yajur Veda. Bharatha who always delighted in chanting Rama's name, was Sama Veda and Satrugna, who obeyed the commands of the three brothers and surrendered himself completely to them, was Atharva Veda. Hence the four brothers were the embodiments of the four Vedas.”¹⁹

Mahabharata [Sanskrit – English] – Veda Vyas(BC)

Mahabharata is another epic, which has more or less the same symbolism as that of *Ramayana*, but the only difference is that it belongs to another era. It symbolizes the conflict between mind and wisdom. Mind blinds man and man lets mind rule him. However, years of experience strengthen the wisdom and man thus learns his lesson. This is a pure reflection of the philosophy given in the sacred text *Bhagavat Gita* which is a part of the epic.

¹⁷"Padapooja: The Essence of Ramayana." *Padapooja.blogspot.in*. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2015.

<<http://padapooja.blogspot.in/2012/10/the-essence-of-ramayana.html>>.

¹⁸Svoboda, Robert. "Clues on the Esoteric Meaning of Ramayan." *Www.indiapost.com*. N.p., 6 Oct. 2010. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.indiapost.com/clues-on-the-esoteric-meaning-of-ramayan/>>.

¹⁹Baba, Sathya Sai. *Perennial Message of The Ramayana*. N.p.: n.p., 25 May 1992. PDF.

Apart from this, various actions in the plot are representations of Hindu spiritual quest. The Pandavas' twelve years of exile according to yogic texts is the spiritual aspiration taking at least twelve years of practice to achieve control over the senses and the one year of anonymity is the stage of achieving heights in spiritual transformation. After this, one will be able to win any material elements which is symbolized by the Kurukshetra war – "the world in which we live this life, witnessing a war between our senses and our mind's tendencies"²⁰ to achieve supreme consciousness.

Abhinjanasakuntalam [Sanskrit – English] – Kalidasa (5th century AD)

Aurobindo says, "Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India, if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history."²¹ Kalidasa the great poet and playwright used excellent creative imagination by retelling and reinterpreting the mythological stories and symbols. In fact, most of the mythological concepts have become archetypes through his creative genius.

In his thesis entitled, 'Adherence to the Dharma for Environmental Harmony in Kalidasa's Abhinjana sakuntalam', Laxmin Prasad Kandel talks about the symbolic reference to Hindu thoughts. He says,

"Kalidasa's play Abhinjanasakuntalam expresses Hindu ideals for jovial coexistence between human and nature. The setting, characters, both human and nonhuman, and the entire plot of the play convey the message of harmony and assume the world an extended family. The heroine, Sakuntala, adheres to the concept of vasudhaivaikutumbakam (extended family) in the play. She moves within the frame of dharma with this concept to maintain affinity with natural phenomena. She expresses compassion to all the natural entities, and, therefore, her every deed moves on the ground of dharma."²²

Dohas [Hindi – English] – Kabir Das (15th century AD)

The best part of Kabir's poems are the 'homespun symbolisms'²³ that are easy to understand. Most of them have their roots in Hindu and Islamic beliefs. Critics say that, "he tries to bring in the idea of intercourse between the soul and transcend using the simple symbols like bridegroom and bride, guru and discipline, the farmer and field etc. He shows the relationship between body and Brahma by symbolizing the body with a lyre that has all sources of music which is Brahman."²⁴ Like sesame contains the oil, fire in flint-stone/Your temple seats the Divine, realize if you can - Here the poet compares sesame with the body and oil the divine. Only when sesame is churned properly can oil be seen; only through vigorous rubbing can fire be ignited from the flintstone; in the same way, the human body has to be uplifted to experience the divine. The temple symbolizes the body which has divinity in it.

Liberation comes not in seclusion listen O ignorant jiva/Enter the arena, says Kabir and combat with the senses - Arena is the battle field, seclusion is sanyasa, jiva is the soul; the idea is that the ignorant soul (jiva) has to fight all senses rather than practise sanyasa (seclusion) in the battle field which is the body. This goes in line with the four stages or ashrams of life mentioned in Hindu doctrine. Puja's article says that, "from Hinduism Kabir accepts the concepts of reincarnation and law of karma. For him, an individual's life always revolves around two

²⁰ Asthana, Kishore. "Symbolism in Mahabharata Has Spiritual Insight." *News*. N.p., 29 Aug. 2008. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/Symbolism-in-Mahabharata-has-spiritual-insight/articleshow/3418050.cms>>.

²¹ Ajithan, P I. *Elements of Śaivism in Kālidāsa's Works*. Shripuram.org. N.p., 2008. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.shripuram.org/index.php/shripuram-news/shripuram-messages/4-elements-of-aivism-in-klidas-works->>>.

²² Kandel, Laxmi Prasad. *Adherence to the Dharma for Environmental Harmony in Kālidāsa's Abhinjanasakuntalam*. Thesis. Tribhuvan University, 2012. N.p.: n.p., n.d. *Academia.edu*. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <http://www.academia.edu/1836975/Adherence_to_the_Dharma_for_Environmental_Harmony_in_K%20%81id%20%81sa_s_Abhijn%20%81nas%20%81kuntalam>.

²³ Das, Subhamoy. "Sant Kabir - Life and Works of the Unique Mystical Saint Poet." *Hinduism.about.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://hinduism.about.com/od/gurussaintsofthepast/a/Kabir.htm>>.

²⁴ Tagore, Rabindranath, and Evelyn Underhill. *Songs of Kabir*. New York: Macmillan, 1917. Print

spiritual principles. The first one is the personal soul i.e. *jivathma* and the second one is God i.e. *eparamathma*. His poems have the essence of giving both social and spiritual lessons based on Indian philosophy to people."²⁵

Njanapana[Malayalam – English] – Poonthanam (16th century AD)

To its credit, literature in Malayalam has a work with supreme philosophy of life and divine expressed in simple words. Though it is a poem, it is the product of devotion and unbearable sorrow. It is titled *Njanapana* and its literal translation is *The Pot of Knowledge* or *The Song of Wisdom*. It is written by a devout Brahmin, Poonthanam during his association with the Guruvayoor temple in Kerala. The work which is also called the *Bhagavat Gita* of Malayalees has the complete essence of all Vedas and Upanishads. *Neerppolapoleyullorudehathil/.....Keerthicheedunnathillathirunaamam*—here, a water bubble is used to symbolize the body. It talks about the short span of life humans have. It also symbolizes the leaving of breath (*pranavayu*) as the bubble bursts. Another interpretation is that even after the bubble bursts nothing happens to water. It remains there. That is the relation between body and soul or atman.

Enthinuvridhaakaalamkaalyunnu/Vaikuntathinupoikkolvinellavarum—‘Vaikundam’ is the abode of Lord Vishnu but symbolically, Vaikundam in Hindu spirituality means our mind. When the mind becomes Vaikundam we experience eternal peace and joy. The word Vaikunda is explained like this.

“It can be defined as "one with vigathakundhabhaavam" or we can say that it is derived from "Vikundha". Kundha means, stupid, indolent, lazy, foolish etc. The prefix "vi" means "vigatha" or departed, disappeared, ceased, gone, dead, deceased etc. So absence of Kundhabhaava (stupidity, foolishness, laziness, indolence etc) is Vaikundha or Vaikundha is a state of mind free from all limitations or conditioning. To put it in our everyday language, Vaikundha is a blissful state of mind free from all anxieties. A place filled with people whose minds are free from anxieties and worries is called Vaikundham. It is a place of uninterrupted bliss. It is a state beyond time, space and causation."²⁶

The Secret of Work[English]– Swami Vivekananda (19th century AD)

Swami Vivekananda is an exponent of Indian Philosophy and scriptures. With no doubt one can say that his literary pieces are infused with Hindu spirituality. His best contribution is the essay ‘The Secret of Work’ wherein he uses various symbols to communicate the philosophy of karma yoga which was also detailed by Lord Krishna to Arjuna as depicted in *Bhagavat Gita*. In the essay it is said that, “water and lotus symbolise mind and work. Similes of ripples and lake have been taken to symbolise action and mind”²⁷. Swami Vivekananda says that once our mind has attained the stage of maturity to remain detached and control the desires; going astray is impossible.

He says, “as the tortoise tucks its feet and head inside the shell and will not come out even though you may break the shell into pieces, even so character of a man who has control over his motives and organs is unchangeably established.”²⁸ This idea which is similar expression is in verse 6 of *Bhagavat Gita* that says, *Karmendriyaanisamyayamaastemanasaasmaran; Indriyarthaanvimoodhaatmaamithyaachaarahsauchyate*. The idea is also strengthened by another statement, “Just as water cannot wet the lotus leaf, so work cannot bind the unselfish man by giving rise to attachment to results.”²⁹ One who has attained *samskara* will not be

²⁵ Puja. "Saint Kabir Das: A Mystic Poet, news Article, Religious News Article- Totalbhakti.com." N.p., 1991. Web. 12 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.totalbhakti.com/Articles/Saint-Kabir-Das:-A-Mystic-Poet/1191.html>>.

²⁶ Puram, Savitri. "Njanapana - Commentary." (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://guruvayoor.com/njanappaana/njanappaana.pdf>>

²⁷ Raghu. "Lotus – the National Flower of India." *News*. N.p., 15 Aug. 2012. Web. 2 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/lotus-the-national-flower-of%20india/article3774100.ece>>.

²⁸ Swami, Vivekananda. "Chapter 1: Work and Its Secret." *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda:002*. N.p.: Vedanta, n.d. N. pag. Print.

²⁹ Swami, Vivekananda. "Chapter 1: Work and Its Secret." *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda:002*. N.p.: Vedanta, n.d. N. pag. Print.

concerned about results. His detachment, selfless love for his duties enables him to be the master of his mind. His mind does not control him but he controls his mind. Once this is achieved, Karma yoga is achieved.

Savitri: A Legend and A Symbol [English] – Aurobindo Gosh (19th century AD)

Among the mystical works of Ghosh, the epic poem *Savitri: A Legend and A Symbol* has the maximum amount of symbolic significance, and one can trace its roots back to the concepts of Hinduism. Roy Posner says, "It is about an individual who overcomes the ignorance, suffering, and death in the world through her spiritual quest, setting the stage for the emergence of a new, divine life on earth. It is loosely based on the ancient Indian tale of 'Savitri and Satyavan' from the Mahabharata."³⁰ In the words of Sri Aurobindo,

"The tale is one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. This is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch, and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life."³¹

One can say that the entire book is based on the journey of characters made from Vedic symbolisms. The spiritual connotations can be derived only when one goes deep into the word meanings and their origins. For example, one research scholar Purani writes in his essay, "The word Savitri is derived from the word "Savitru" in turn is derived from the root "Su", to give birth to. The word, "Soma" which indicates "an exhilarating drink", symbolising spiritual ecstasy or delight, is also derived from the same word, "Su". It links therefore to creation. "Savitru therefore means the creation."³² According to The Mother on the work Savitri, "... everything is there: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, the history of man, of the gods, of creation, of Nature."³³

Gitanjali[Bengali - English] – Rabindranath Tagore (19th century AD)

Tagore's works centres around the "unity of all creation"³⁴ which is parallel to the crux of the Upanishads. Perhaps a background study of Hindu Philosophy will aid in understanding Tagore's work to its full essence. The symbolisms used in the poem *Gitanjali* are countless. He writes, "*Thy sword with its curve of lightning like the outspread wings of the divine bird of Vishnu*"³⁵. From the perspective of spirituality 'sword' is being referred to as a weapon against materialism. The sword is compared to the divine bird 'Garuda' of Lord Vishnu. Garuda is the enemy of snakes. Snake, in one of its symbolizations, represents sexuality in Hindu Philosophy, and Garuda, being spirituality is divine. Virginity here takes the meaning of pure mind or adetached mind. The theme of spiritual love is the essence here. Tagore claims that he has kept his soul a virgin, "*she*

³⁰Posner, Roy. "ANALYSIS OF SRI AUROBINDO'S 'SAVITRI'" *Gurusoftware.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.gurusoftware.com/GuruNet/AurobindoMother/Savitri/Frame.htm>>.

³¹"Sri AurobindoSavitri A Legend and a Symbol." *Savitrithepoem.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. <<http://savitrithepoem.com/the-poem.html>>

³²Palit, Romen. "Sri Aurobindo'sSavitri and Its Critics." *Triveni* (1981): n. pag.*SriAurobindo'sSavitri and Its Critics*. 1981. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. <<http://yabaluri.org/TRIVENI/CDWEB/sriurobindossavitrianditscriticsoct81.htm>>.

³³Posner, Roy. "Analysis of Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri'" *Gurusoftware.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.gurusoftware.com/GuruNet/AurobindoMother/Savitri/Frame.htm>>.

³⁴Rosemary, M, and Reisman Canfield. "Rabindranath Tagore Essay - Rabindranath Tagore Poetry: World Poets Analysis - ENotes.com." *ENotes.com*. N.p., 2011. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.enotes.com/topics/rabindranath-tagore/critical-essays/analysis-1>>.

³⁵Tagore, R., & Yeats, W. B. (1994). *Gitanjali: song offerings; a collection of prose translations made by the author from the original Bengali* (Macmillan pocket Tagore ed.). Madras: Macmillan India.

remained in her loneliness waiting for thy recognition"³⁶, a clear depiction of male-female love. The soul is treated as female and God as the perfect male. This finds its link in the *Prakriti-Purusha* concept in the Hindu philosophy. The same concept is also expounded in his one act play *Chandalika* in which the union of Prakriti and Purusha is represented by suggesting that when innate nature (Prakriti) purifies itself from earthly desires, the supreme power (Purusha) accepts the cherished union. Rama Rao says, "Chandalika is a cosmic drama. Prakriti stands for Nature. Mother for the earth, a symbol of patience, suffering and understanding. The primal spell may be taken as the "force of attraction" in Nature, particularly of sex, Ananda stands for spirit, the awakening and bliss."³⁷

Tagore then proceeds to talk about the philosophy of rebirth. It is said in the *Bhagavat Gita* that when the soul leaves the body, it takes another body to fulfill its karma. It passes from one body to another until it reaches the desired salvation. The poet brings out this philosophy through the lines, "Days come and age pass, and it is ever he who moves my heart in many a name, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow". "Here I give back the keys of my door – and I give up all claims to my house."³⁸ These lines are most noteworthy when referring to realization. Here 'body' is symbolized by 'door' and the keys to the door are the 'panchabhootas' (five elements). It is said that the five elements join together to form a body and once the soul leaves it, the body separates to re-join the respective elements, indirectly referring to the cremation of dead bodies practiced in the Hindu culture and age-old civilizations. Eventually, he sees Him, the formless, again referring to the Hindu concept of the formless God that manifests itself in many forms for different reasons, that is, 'Sivam, Santham and Advaitam' – Perfection, Peace and Non-duality.

Trees [English] – Gita Mehta (20th century AD)

It is said that, "Gita Mehta deals with its complex ethos by exploring its various aspects like spiritualism, the east-west cultural crosscurrents, renunciation, mythology, deep rootedness of Indian values in spite of the acceptance of modern means of living, folk traditions etc. The complex nexus between the traditional and the modern currents of Indian culture is one of her dominant themes"³⁹. In the essay 'Trees' in the book *Snakes and Ladders*, she brings out the spiritual meaning of trees to Indians, which is a reflection of giving divinity to nature and its elements.

She has used the act of a manglik girl marrying a tree to remove her bad luck as a symbol to express how trees are venerated by ancient Indians which is detailed in Vedas. She has also used the forest as a symbol of great knowledge and learning as she says that all scriptures and Vedas emerged when people were in deep meditation in forests. Devdutt in his article 'Under the Banyan Tree' talks about the spiritual symbolism associated with trees in Hindu culture and one can see that almost all Hindu god forms are related to particular trees based on their characteristics.

Hayavadana and Nagamandala [English] – Girish Karnad (20th century AD)

Girish Karnad's works are a pure reflection of Indian culture and Hindu religious ideas. Most of works are the retelling of mythology and folklore that are associated with Hinduism. For example,

"with Hayavadana, Karnad takes us back to the myths and legends of the Hindu religion. The characters of Kapila and Devadatta are manifestations of the images of different castes in our society. In our society, a Brahmin is learned and wise but physically weak. Likewise, the image of Devadatta is stereotypical of a male Brahmin whereas Kapila, a Kshatriya, is a wrestler and is not as wise as Devadatta. The Hindu rituals

³⁶ Tagore, R., & Yeats, W. B. (1994). *Gitanjali: song offerings; a collection of prose translations made by the author from the original Bengali* (Macmillan pocket Tagore ed.). Madras: Macmillan India.

³⁷ Rao, Rama. "Symbolism in the Three Plays of Tagore..." *Triveni* (1985): n. pag. *Symbolism in the Three Plays of Tagore...* 1985. Web. 4 Jan. 2015.

<<http://yabaluri.org/TRIVENI/CDWEB/symbolisminthethreeplaysoftagorejan85.htm>>.

³⁸ Tagore, R., & Yeats, W. B. (1994). *Gitanjali: song offerings; a collection of prose translations made by the author from the original Bengali* (Macmillan pocket Tagore ed.). Madras: Macmillan India.

³⁹ Bhatnagar, Mamta, and Asha Kadyan. "Gita Mehta's Snakes and Ladders: A Study of Tradition and Modernity." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSSELL)* 2.9 (2014): 92-99. *Arcjournals.org*. Sept. 2014. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v2-i9/12.pdf>>.

and superstitions are very well portrayed by showing people offering themselves to Kali. The theme also reveals the Upanishad principle that visualizes the human body as a symbol of the organic relationship of the parts to the whole."⁴⁰

In the essay entitled, 'Mythical Structure in Girish Karnad's Naga Mandala', Dolores Collellmirsets out to prove how the story, plot, triangular relationship and the triple ending are a symbolic representation of mandala which is a tantric sign in Hindu rituals. He says that

"the characters of the play appear in two groups of three interrelated individuals that can be visualized geometrically as two intertwined triangles. In Hindu tradition the intersection of two triangles, one pointing upwards and another one pointing downwards, indicates the union of the male and female principles, that is the union between Shiva – the supreme consciousness and Shakti – the creative force"⁴¹.

Apart from this, he has also given Rani a symbolic representation of soul attaining liberation by awakening of Kundalini energy which is symbolized as a snake in Vedas, as the cobra in the play has given her the pace for physical, emotional and spiritual transformation.

Shikyam [Malayalam – English] – A C Raja (Contemporary Era)

A C Raja, writer and spiritual guru, is the disciple of Sri Ayya Guru and comes in lineage with Sri Chatampi Swamikal and Sri Narayana Guru. A research scholar has classified his contributions as spiritual, yogic and earthly. Though his earthly works are about our happenings in our society, the crux of spiritual lesson are not far from those. He uses various symbols to bring out the Hindu spiritual philosophy implanted in our social life and culture.

For example, the work *Shikyam* which has been translated into English as *Thurible*, talks about the way simple human beings can transform into cosmic humans by following the right path which the modern world is ignorant of. Even the title 'Shikyam' is symbolic. In the words of the translator, "The word Sikyam means *Uri* in Malayalam. *Uri* is a domestic swinging shelf hung by a rope for keeping articles in vessels. *Uri* is a must in all Vedic rituals. Today *Uri* is rarely found among Hindu houses. The story gives the message that *Uri* that preserves food is the spirituality that man carries in him, but that disappeared now in this modern world."⁴²

Conclusion

Symbols are the most effective medium used by Indian writers to get the readers involved in a piece of work. Rather than allowing the readers to get away with the literal meaning of the work, the Indian writers have taken upon themselves the responsibility of making their writing serve a purpose by going beyond the story and action. In fact, the Hindu systems and culture has enabled them to achieve this goal. I feel that the elevated status given to *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* that form the core of Indian writing is because of the carefully-structured symbolisms that have been used to make man understand the supreme spiritual and cultural knowledge. These kinds of symbolic writings are difficult as the writer has to look for objects and frame characters to bring out the intended symbolism. The ideals of Hinduism would not have nourished the generations one after another if this had not been done. When the symbolist movement gained momentum in the English world in 19th century, Indian writings already had the technique being used from the prehistoric times. The inspiration for them to practice this was the traditions, beliefs, ethics and practices in Hinduism. Therefore, an erudite scholar of Indian Literature is also an exponent in Hindu religious and cultural philosophy.

⁴⁰ Bala, Vaishnavi. "Hayavadana- A Tale of Love, Identity and Sexuality." *Merinews.com*. N.p., 7 Jan. 2010. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.merinews.com/article/hayavadana--a-tale-of-love-identity-and-sexuality/15793428.shtml>>.

⁴¹ Collellmir, Dolores. "Mythical Structure in Girish Karnad's Naga-Mandala." *Bells15* (n.d.): n. pag. *Publicacions.ub.edu*. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.publicacions.ub.edu/revistes/bells15/documentos/71.pdf>>.

⁴² A C Raja. *Thurible/Shikyam*. Trans. Rajeve Nair. Mumbai: Leadstart, 2014. Web. 2014. <<http://www.leadstartcorp.com/fiction-general/thurible/>>.

As the essay proves, without Hinduism and its doctrines, the foundation of Indian writings would be fragile. But the current trend of failure to understand the exact philosophy causes diminishing faith in the customs and beliefs. Moreover, the absurdist trend of the modern age has led to the reinterpretation of the writings especially by portraying heroism in the justified defeat of villains and thereby evoking sympathy from readers. Consequently, the Hindu spiritual ideologies fail to reach people and the disappearing divinity and spirituality is a sign of the same. Symbolisms have to be interpreted in the right way by their sources being traced. In this context, Hinduism is actually a source for literary writings developed from the land of the Indians. However, literature being the manifestation of individual thoughts is open and vast like an ocean and as days pass by writers may even change the whole ideology underlying the works and thus Hinduism will find its way through generations.

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