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# Mythological Tales of Two Lands: India and Greece

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**Received:** 15 May 2023

**Accepted:** 01 August 2023

**Published:** 11 September 2023

***Abstract: Both India and Greece have a lot of mythological tales and many characters show a resemblance. The great epic of Mahabharata and Ramayana has a lot of character. Both Myth and Tales of the land have moulded mankind and society throughout the ages. The three Gods of Hinduism, namely Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh represent a trilogy. Zeus the God in Greece is most revered. This paper finds out the similarity between the Gods of Hinduism (India) and the Gods of Greece. Mythological tales were inserted in the lineage of dynasties in different periods by different people at various regional locations. They all have become voluminous and have contributed to shaping the tales of the land.***

***Keywords: Mythology, Tales, Greece, India.***

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mythologies are historic tales transferred from one generation to another and are connected with the land. These tales have added cultural dimensions to its people. Both India and Greece has tales associated with their land in the form of Myths and Mythology. Four Vedas, Eighteen Purans, Upnishads, and two great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are the sources of tales of India. The characters of Hindu mythology are the Gods, demigods, Demons, Rishis (teachers), Apsaras (nymphs), animals, and serpents. God used to fight the demonic forces to restore peace and harmony. Demons were in search of power and immortality. It created a war between Gods and Demons. Gods represented the truth while demons were epitomes of vices. Mythological tales were inserted in the lineage of dynasties in different periods by different people at various regional locations. They all have become voluminous and have contributed to shaping the tales of the land.

### Literature Survey

Myths are the tales of the land. These tales are carried from generation to generation without questioning rationality. Myths are tales that are not true. History in its true form is the actual incidences well narrated. Both Myths and Tales of the land have moulded mankind and society

throughout the ages. Myths are transmitted from one generation to another without knowing who created them. This is called traditional. (Graf, 1985) So a tale is created by an individual, carried over through generations in the form of a tradition known as ‘myth’. (Burkert, 1979) Plato was a philosopher in Greece. (Most, 2012) relates that there are eight main features of the Platonic myth. (a) Myths are a monologue, (one-way conversation) in which the listener does not interrupt, making the speaker the supreme; (b) they are told by an older speaker to younger listeners, showing the importance of wisdom as gained through age; (c) they “go back to older, explicitly indicated or implied, real or fictional oral sources”, they narrate older (archaic) stories or tales ; (d) they cannot be empirically verified (since the question cannot be asked in monologue, a controversy cannot arise out of irrational narrative) ; (e) their narration is derived from tradition and faith, and “for this reason, they are not subject to rational examination by the audience and questioning of the factual events” ; (f) they have a psychologic effect: pleasure, or a motivating impulse to perform an action “capable of surpassing any form of rational persuasion” ; (g) they are descriptive or narrative; (h) they precede or follow a dialectical exposition.

Hinduism is based on broadly two principles.

(a) Cosmic evolution starts from hiranyagarbh (a golden egg). It passes through four phases (Sat-yug, Treta-Yug, Dwapar- Yug and Kalyug) and ends. The process again starts in a cyclic order.

(b) Human soul is immortal. Every soul takes a rebirth depending upon the karma.

The main theme depicting the Greek Mythology are listed below

(a) War Theme- These are inevitable for existence.

(b) Love Theme- These are loyalty, lust, and urge for sexual desire.

(c) Heroic Themes- These are individual achievements that put God above humans.

(d) Underworld Cultures- representing death morality and faith.

The earliest Greek literature was in verse. Prose arrived in the mid of 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. (Dowden, 1992) In Greek Mythology, the trio Zeus, Hades and Poseidon is represented as supremo God similar to Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh, Puranic trinity in Indian Mythology.

### **Geographical Connections**

Both the Greek and Indian myths have strong geo-referencing in their stories. These geographical identities (mountains, hillocks, rivers, seas, islands) are going to stand for a larger period and several generations have been watching and narrating. Myths are connected with the geography of the land and the cities along with the kingdom’s capital. This connectedness gives a near-realistic touch to the myths and they seem to appear as true stories.

- **Mountains**

In Indian Mythology Mountains has a good narration. Its scale represents the mightiness. While Shiva’s residence is considered as Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, her wife Parvati has derived her name from parvat (mountain). The parents of Parvati are Himavat (one of glaciers) and Mainavati. Even today the annual pilgrimage to Amarnath in Kashmir is practiced where the shiva linga appears out of a glacier in the form of a stalagmite and is a symbolic representation of Shiva.



Mount Meru is an imaginary mountain considered to be as high as 75 times the Earth's diameter. It is the abode of several Gods and Goddesses. Mount Meru is considered the center of all physical, metaphysical, and spiritual universes.

In another reference, a small hill is mentioned which is in Eastern India. Mandar Hill (Banka, Bihar) was used as a churning rod for churning the sea in order to get the amrit (elixir). Both the Gods and the demons joined hands for churning the sea and whatever they got it was distributed among them.

There is a small hillock in South India Maruda Malai near Coimbatore. In Ramayan during the war with Ravana in Lanka, when Laxmana was injured by 'sarpastra', the only cure was a plant extract that was available in Dronagiri Mountain in the Himalayas. Hanuman was given the task to get the sanjeevni, the plant which had the property of glowing at night. When Hanuman reached Himalaya, on a mountain he found whole mountain twinkling. Without wasting a moment Hanuman carried the whole mountain to Lanka. On the way a small cliff fell off known as Maruda Malai which is said that it has the sacred plants having a healing property.

Krishna one lifted the Govardhan hill at Mathura (currently in Uttar Pradesh, India) to protect the cows and the city from flood fury created by Lord Indra.

Trikut hill is in Jammu region of Kashmir, where in a cave houses the shrines of Vaishno Devi. Vaishno Devi (earlier Vaishnavi) was born in South India with accumulated divine power of Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati to restore peace on Earth created by the evil forces. She grew up a learned and courageous lady and got the wish that she will merge into Vishnu once she attains the consciousness. Vaishnavi was once chased by Bhairo, whom she killed and escaped to caves. She is waiting in the caves of Trikut for the last incarnation of Vishnu in the form of Kalki to merge with him.

In Greek mythology, Mount Olympus is home to twelve Olympian gods. This mountain was created by Olympians after the battle of Titanomachy between the older Gods of Titan and the newer Gods of Olympians. After the victory, they created their new abode of Olympus. The Gods used to meet Zeus in his palace and drank nectar and ate ambrosia (food of God), which claimed their immortality. The fate of the mortals was discussed in the meeting of Gods. No humans could come near Olympus.

Mount Othrys in central Greece is believed to be the home of the Titans during ten-year long war with the Olympians. In Greek mythology, Titanomachy was a 10-year battle between the older Titan and the younger Olympians Gods.

Mount Ida is in the island of Crete believed to be the sacred mountain of Rhea the Titan Goddess.

Greek mythology refers mountain as the sacred home only, while Indian Mythology has descriptions of using mountain as churning rod (Mandar Hill), lifting of mountain for at least two occasion (Hanuman and Krishna) apart from abode of God.

- **Water Bodies**

Ganga and Yamuna is the most pious river referred in Indian mythology. Ganga is referred to as Mother and called 'Ganga Ma'. Ganga river was once flowing in Heaven and had a cosmic descent on the hair lock of Shiva at Kailash Mountain in Himalayan range and flowing through the plains finally meeting the Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean. Yamuna is referred as mother Yami. 'Triveni Sangam' at Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India, is the meeting point of three rivers,



Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, the latter being extinct now. A religious bath is held every twelve years at Haridwar, Allahabad, Nashik and Indore known as Kumbh Mela.

Kashi, Varanasi is important historic city in India. Situated on the bank of river Ganga, is one of the oldest city of India. As per mythology this city was established by Shiva where he was brought from Mount Kailash by Parvati to lead a life from hermit to household living.

Ram built a bridge connecting India with Lanka (now Sri Lanka) to fight with Ravana to get his wife Sita who was under the custody of Ravana. This stone bridge was built by the help of Nal and Neil (son of Vishwakarma) by writing 'Ram' on each stone and it floated in sea water. Numerous stones were put to make the bridge for the soldier (consisting of monkeys) to cross the sea and wage a war with Ravana.

The Geography of Greece was surrounded by sea and many islands were dotted with fisherman community. Philosopher Plato once commented that the Greek people were like frogs sitting around a pond! So the Gods were associated with the physical features of the sea, the dangers of the sea and lately the protecting Gods for those who ventured into sea, i.e. sailors and fisherman. Each and every water body is associated with Gods and demi gods.

Pontus was the primordial Greek sea God. He is primarily associated with Mediterranean Sea. Nerus was the original old man of the sea, and was associated with bountiful supply of fish in the sea. Phorcys was the sea god associated with dangers of the open water.

Oceanus was the Titan God of water. **Oceanus was thought of as a river that encircled the whole earth.** Achelous is the Greek River God. It is the largest river in Greece. He was son of Oceanus and Tethys, the Titan God and was oldest and honoured.

Poseidon was Olympian era sea god. **Aegaeon was the God of violent sea storms. Amphitrite was the queen of the seas and wife of Poseidon. Cymopoleia was the God of sea currents and waves. Sirens was sea nymphs who drew sailors to their death with their enchanting songs. Ceto was the dangers of the sea, identified as a goddess of sharks, whales and sea monsters. Brizo was patron God of sailors and fisherman. Leucothea was sea Goddess who aided sailors in distress. Glaucus was prophetic God who protected sailors and fisherman during storms.**

Naiad are the nymphs which control and presides over fountains, wells, springs, streams, brooks and other bodies of fresh water. Naiads were associated with fresh water, Oceanids with salt water and Nereids with Mediterranean.

Greek Water God	Significance
Ocenus	Titan God of Water
Poseidon	Olympian Era Sea God
Nereus	The Original Old Man of the Sea associated with bountiful supply of fish
Pontus	The Primordial Greek Sea God
Phorcys	Greek God of hidden dangers of the sea
Triton	Messenger of the Sea

- **Mystic Figures and Appearances**

In both Indian and Greek mythology there are certain figures that are mystique in nature and irrational in today's world. They were symbolic in nature and often depicted God as supernatural elements.

God of creation Brahma had five heads. Ravan king of Lanka had 10 heads and 20 hands. Durga had ten hands equipped with weapons. A seven headed horse, Uchhaishravas, the divine horse which came out of samundra manthan (ocean churning) given to Bali. Ganesh had an elephant head and human body. Narasimha is the avatar of Vishnu part human and part lion. Zeus (Greece) is considered as supreme God, often referred as Kings of God with abode at Olympus, the highest peak of Greece. Similarly in Hindu mythology God Mahesh (synonyms with Shanker, Bhola) also known as Mahadev (God of Gods) with adobe at Kailash in Himalayas. While Mahadev is represented by Nandi (bull) Zeus in Greek mythology is represented by thunderbolt, eagle, bull and oak. While Zeus represent lightning and Thunder, in Hindu mythology its equivalence is Indra. There is concept of Brahman the supreme God known as Prarambh (the beginning) or Parmatma (supreme atma). Vedas mention Brahman as impersonal form while puran mention trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh) as personal manifestation of Brahman.

Let us look the 'Saviour' God. The God who saves when one is in danger. This danger is either of life or when over-all wellbeing is at stake. It is symbolically represented by Vishnu in Indian Mythology and Soter in Greece. Symbolically Vishnu has four hands carrying a chakra (a weapon which can decapitate one's head from body) in one hand and conch, lotus and a mace. His consort is Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity. God Vishnu in Hindu mythology has ten avatar (incarnation). They are matasya (fish) the first incarnation and regarded as the first physical beings of this world. It gives the hint of the origin of life from water. The second is the kurma (tortoise). This creature can survive both in water and land. Third is vraha (boar). Fourth is Narsimha (Lion -man). This is mythological creature with half lion and half man. Fifth is vamana (the dwarf), sixth is Parshuram. Seventh is Rama the main character of Ramayana. Eighth is Krishna, ninth, Buddha and tenth is Kalki. In Vishnu Puran the period is divided into four yug. It's a cyclic process starting with Satyug, Treta yug, Dwapar yug and Kalyug. It is mentioned that, Krishna was in Dwapar yug and right now we are in the period of Kalyug. Once the Kalyug ends, everything will be over and cyclic process will start with Satyug. In Greece Soter was regarded as a daimon (a personified spirit) a lesser God and having position in-between Human and God.

<b>Indian God</b>	<b>Greek God</b>	<b>Features</b>
Brahma	Tethys	The Supreme Creator
Vishnu	Soter	The Saviour
Mahesh/ Shanker	Zeus	The Supreme God
Durga	Kratos	God of Strength and Power, War
Lakshmi	Plutus	God of Wealth and Prosperity
Saraswati	Athena	God of Wisdom and Knowledge
Indra	Zeus*	God of Sky (lightning and Thunder)
Kamdev	Eros	God of Love, Sex and Desire





Yamraj	Hades	God of Dead, Underworld
Surya (Sun)	Apollo	Sun God
Vishwakarma	Hephaestus	Metalwork

\*God Zeus has additional power of Lightning and Thunder

Katos (demigod) is personification of strength in Greek Mythology. He is God of war signifying power. In Indian Mythology the Goddess of Power is bestowed on Durga. Durga is reincarnation of Parvati, consort of Shiva with additional powers of Saraswati and Lakshmi. She is there to combat evils and demonic forces that threaten peace, prosperity and dharma (religion). In a mythological story there was a war between demon and the Gods. The Gods were led by Indra. The demons defeated the God and the God's after defeat, assembled in the mountains and combined all their divine energies to culminate in Goddess Durga. New born Durga defeated the demon Mahisasur.

Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu is the symbol of wealth and prosperity. She was born out of ocean churning (samudra manthan) Lakshmi is often worshipped along with Ganesh for removing any obstacles and all round prosperity. Similarly in Greek mythology Plutus is the personification of abundance.

Saraswati the consort of Brahma is symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Seated on a swan and carrying a string instrument Veena is famous among the students for blessings of Saraswati to gain knowledge. Athena is most famous at Acropolis where her temple Parthenon is located. Athena a virgin Goddess sprang out of Zeus forehead. She is portrayed as grey eyed and inventor of flute, although she never played it. Owl is the bird of Athena. City of Athens is named after her. She is the protector of the city.

Indra, once considered as most powerful God of thunder and lightning residing in heaven surrounded by apsaras (nymph dancers in heaven) and Gandharva (male singers). He is a lustrous God and fear of his throne being overpowered by demons by meditation always looped his mind. He used to trap demons by giving them a diplomatic wish and kill them with his wit. To Rishis he used to lure with apsara's when his power was at stake. Zeus the tried in Greek Mythology is shown with thunder and lightning. Zeus shared the power of Indra and Shiva in terms of symbolic power.

Kamdev is the God of Love in India. He is the son of Vishnu and Laxmi. His wife is Rati. Kamdev was instrumental in setting a romantic atmosphere for Parvati with Shiva while in meditation. Knowing this Shiva was angered and burnt down Kamdev with his third eye. He had magical bow and arrow, when shot would arouse love between two.

Yamraj is God of death in India. Its equivalent is Hades in Egypt. Hades is youngest son of Cronus and Rhea. He is the king of the underworld.

Sun God in India is 'Surya' God. In Greece it is Helios which drove chariot from East to West every day. Vishwakarma was the creator of Swarg (heaven) in Satyug, Lanka in Treta Yug, and Dwarka in Dwapar Yug. Apart from that he made the flying chariot 'pushpak viman' and the apsara 'Tilotma'.

Hephaestus was the god of fire, metalworking, stone masonry, forges and the art of sculpture.



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