

Hindu mythology assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Cosmic myths are concerned with the world and how it is ordered. They seek to explain the origin of the world, universal catastrophes and natural disasters such as fire or floods, as well as the afterlife. Nearly all mythologies have stories about creation. This type of story is technically known as cosmogony, meaning “ birth of the world. “. These Creation stories also include myths of how human beings first came into existence and how death and suffering entered human experience.

In my assignment, I have chosen to describe the creation myth of Hinduism as I am a Hindu myself. I shall begin by creating a clear understanding of Hinduism thereafter proceeding on to discuss the various creation myths of this culture as well as its many religious beliefs. Finally, I will conclude my essay. Hinduism is currently followed by one fifth of humankind. (A Michaels, 2004: 12) It is a religious tradition of Indian origin, embracing the beliefs and practices of Hindus. Hinduism is a religion of diverse gods and goddesses.

It comprises elaborate ritual and a striking tolerance for diversity, or the possibility of different spiritual paths for many different people and at different times in their lives. (P. F Lurquin & L Stone, 2007: 25) Our Hindu festivals tend to be vibrant and lively, and are celebrated with much devotion and purity. Contrary to Judaism, Islam and Christianity each of which complies with just one religious book, Hinduism has many religious texts. (P. F Lurquin & L Stone, 2007: 25) Such books as the Rig-Veda and the Bhagavad-Gita come to mind.

The Rig-Veda is the oldest Hindu sacred text and does not present its version of creation as fact. (P. F Lurquin & L Stone, 2007: 25) Bhagavad-Gita directly

translated means “ Song of the Lord”. (W. Doniger, 2007). It is a Sanskrit poem, consisting of 700 verses divided into 18 chapters, that is regarded by most Hindus as their most important text. (W. Doniger, 2007). To most Hindus, including myself, it is the essence of our belief. Almost every significant Hindu philosopher has written a commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita, and new translations and interpretations continue to appear.

According to Alex Michaels (2004: 59), it was probably completed in the second century A. D. The Bhagavad-Gita incorporates many doctrines, such as the immortality of the individual soul (Known as “ atman” in Hindi) and its identity with the supreme godhead (Brahman), the process of reincarnation, and the need to renounce the fruits of one’s actions. (W. Doniger, 2007) Now that I have given you a brief overview of Hinduism and its’ religious texts, I shall go on to discuss the creation myths of this culture.

The process of creation did not proceed as smoothly as might have been expected; from its beginning the rivals of the gods kept a keen eye on the proceedings. (A. L Dallapiccola, 2003: 26) Hinduism has more than one myth of creation. One version restricts itself to saying that some sort of substance, commonly known to Hindus as “ prakrit”, is at the origin of all that exists in the universe. (P. F Lurquin & L. Stone, 2007: 25) Another version has beliefs that are similar to that of Christianity and Greek mythology, where the world arises out of chaos and nothingness.

This version is much more descriptive than the first. It explains how the universe is reborn multiple times in cycles of destruction and creation. This could also be described as the times when the universe takes form and the

times when it dissolves back into nothing. (P. F Lurquin & L. Stone, 2007: 25)

In this story, before time began, there was no heaven, no earth and no space between. The Greeks, too, believe that the world was created out of chaos and a state of nothingness as stated in Hesiod's theogony: " When on high heaven was not named, Nor was the hard ground below called by name ' "(B.

B. Powell, 2002: 87) Each new creation originates from a vast ocean that washes upon the shores of nothingness. (P. F Lurquin & L. Stone, 2007: 26)

In Hindu myth, Lord Vishnu, peacefully asleep in the coils of a giant cobra, is awakened by the humming sound of Om in the middle of this ocean. Om is the most sacred syllable in the ancient Sanskrit language of India and is considered in Hinduism to represent all scriptural revelation in a single symbol. (G. Beck, 2007). The humming sound of Om grew and spread, filling the emptiness and throbbing with energy.

From his divine playfulness, a lotus flower grows in Vishnu's navel. (A. Michaels, 2004: 298) Brahma, another Hindu god, is known in this particular myth as Vishnu's servant as he follows Vishnu's commands. Brahma is also a god who is more commonly known as the creator. He appears out of the lotus flower that is formed in Vishnu's navel, and asks Vishnu who he is. Vishnu very arrogantly replies, " Know that I am origin and disintegration. See in me the whole world, the continents and their mountains, the oceans and the seven seas, and you too, the grandfather of the worlds. " (A.

Michaels, 2004: 298). It is here that Brahma is astonished and quickly responds in his defense. Brahma says," I am the creator and priest, the self-existing patriarch; in me everything is erected. " A curious Vishnu peers into

Brahma's belly. There, he sees all three worlds with gods, men, and demons. (A. Michaels, 2004: 299). Astounded he orders Brahma to come into his (Vishnu's) belly. There Brahma finds no end and no way out, because Vishnu has closed all doors. Only the navel offers him a way out and he is forced to appear on the lotus flower. Brahma was now at Vishnu's mercy.

Vishnu spoke to his servant: " It's time to begin. " Brahma bowed. Vishnu commanded: " Create the world. " (P. F Lurquin & L. Stone, 2007: 25). Vishnu and the serpent then vanished, and Brahma remained in the lotus flower, floating and tossing on the sea. Brahma uses parts of the lotus flower to build the universe, including Earth. (P. F Lurquin & L. Stone, 2007: 25). He split the lotus flower into three ' he stretched one part into the heavens, he made another part into the sky and with the third part of the flower he created the sky. (A. Michaels, 2004: 299).

He then populated the earth with humans. It is also believed that Gods created the human race by dismembering the cosmic man who was known as Purusa. (D. A Learning, 2001)The importance of this myth is that the caste system is founded in it. The caste system says that certain sections of society are meant by birth for certain tasks. There are four traditional castes of Hindu society which are: priests (' Brahmins'), nobles (' kshatriyas'), general populace (' vaishyas') and the servants (' shudras'); each was created for observance and performance of certain duties which carry particular importance. A. L Dallapiccola, 2003: 24) The priests were believed to have been born from the mouth of the cosmic man, the nobles from his arm, the general populace from his thighs and the servants from his feet. (D. A Learning, 2001) The Hindu myth for the creation of humans is somewhat

similar to many other creation myths, namely Chinese and Inuit/Eskimo creation myth, as it involves the dismembering of another being in order to create humankind.

In the above-mentioned myth about the creation of the world, Vishnu and Brahma compete for the creation; both have let the world emerge in their bellies and have taken it back and this clearly emphasizes that no single creator god is accepted in the Hindu religion. (A. Michaels, 2004: 298).

Similarly there is no single creation myth. In another myth, it is Brahma from which everything has emerged and it is believed that he created gods, demons, ancestors and humans. Firstly, the element of darkness emerges in him from which the demons appear and this body becomes night. A.

Michaels, 2004: 299). Demons are generally associated with all things dark and shady. Brahma then takes another body with a great deal of purity and from his mouth, the gods emerge and he gives this body up too, which becomes day; therefore men worship gods in the day. (A. Michaels, 2004: 299). He then takes a body that is all purity and thinks of his sons, and thus the forefathers emerge between day and night. He again leaves this body and it becomes known as twilight. Finally he assumes a body that is all energy and this body becomes moonlight. (A.

Michaels, 2004: 299). From his organ of thought men emerge and in a similar way, he creates animals, spirits and plants. This myth clearly indicates that the world is created from divine bodies. (A. Michaels, 2004: 300),

Eschatological myths are related to cosmogonic myths, but at the other extreme. These are myths describing the end of the world and are usually products of urban traditions. (Microsoft Encarta online Encyclopedia, 2008)

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Eschatological myths assume the creation myth of the world by a moral divine being or deity, who inevitably destroys the world in the end.

Unlike Hebrews, Christians and Muslims, Hindus believe that the world is never-ending but instead a continuous cycle involving reincarnation and recreation. Behind this is a deeply rooted cyclical awareness of time, which holds that life consists of an eternal return, of an eternally new expansion and contraction of the world. (A. Michaels, 2004: 302). This is all written in the pages of the Yuga Doctrine which emerged with the crises that erupted with the infiltration of foreigners into northwest India and is understood as a theory of degeneration. (A.

Michaels, 2004: 302) Hienrich von Stietencron (1975: 55) argues that the doctrine also be understood as a justification for a new form of religion and a radical religious change ‘ this is because it argues that Lord Vishnu will appear at the end of the present age, known as the Kali Yuga, as a white horse and he will save the good people. (A. Michaels, 2004: 302). At the end of the world, the Earth is almost empty and for one hundred years drought will prevail ‘ Lord Vishnu will become a Rudra in order to destroy all living creatures and drink up all the water, the water of all three worlds. A.

Michaels, 2004: 302). A sea of flames will burn up everything and many different clouds appear which are then blown away by Vishnu. Torrential rains will put out the fire and the whole world will become flooded, drowning everything and submerging it in water. For one hundred years, it will rain and Vishnu will eventually blow out the wind that will blow the clouds off and finally, Vishnu will return to rest on the serpent in the middle of the ocean

and assume the form of Brahma in order to create the world all over again.

(A.

Michaels, 2004: 302). This emphasizes that Hindus believe in rebirth and recreation which ultimately regenerates something that has been destroyed hence resulting in a continuous cycle involving reincarnation and regeneration whereby there is always change and transformation in the universe. In conclusion, one can see that in Hinduism there is little, if any, conflict between creation and evolution and Hinduism can easily reconcile the idea of creation with that of change. In life, everything passes away yet; Change is the only constant. In the remoteness of the original beginning, we, by trusting the former sages, perceive the era of the genesis of Deities and of the establishment of men. ” – Anonymous Bibliography • Beck, G. , “ Om. ” Microsoft® Encarta®, Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2006. • Dallapiccola, A. L, “ Hindu Myths. ” University of Texas Press, 2003. ISBN 0292702337, 9780292702332. • Doniger, W. , “ Bhagavad-Gita. ” Microsoft® Encarta® 2007, Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2006. • Leerning, D. A. , “ A Dictionary of Asian Mythology. Oxford University Press, 2001. • Lurquin, P. F. & Stone, L. , “ Evolution and Religious Creation myths: How scientists respond. ” Oxford University Press US, 2007. • Michaels, A. , “ Hinduism ‘ Past and Present. ” Princeton University Press, Oxfordshire, 2004. • Powell, B. B. , “ A short Introduction to Classical Myth. ” Pearson Education, Inc. , New Jersey, 2002. • “ Mythology. ” Microsoft® Encarta®, online encyclopedia 2008. Available at: <http://uk. encarta. man. com> © 1997 ‘ 2008, Microsoft Corporation.