

The Symbolic Identity Of Hindu Religiosity And Environment

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Introduction:

Mythology is a part of every religion. Mythology is nothing but concretized philosophy. Mythology is a science of myths or fables or legends founded on remote events, made in early period of a people existence. The abstract teachings and highly subtle ideas are made highly interesting and impressive to the masses through the garb of stories, parables, legends, allegories and narratives. Every religion has three sections- philosophy, mythology and ritual. Philosophy is the essence of religion; it sets the basic principles or fundamental doctrines. Mythology illustrates philosophy by means of the legendary lives of great men or supernatural being. Ritual is a concrete form of philosophy so that everyone can understand it; ritual consists of forms, ceremonies. In Puranas of Hindu mythology the cosmogenic myths are interesting. Portion of Hindu mythology is presented to the public in the form of dramas during days of Hindu festivals. Minds of the Hindu people are saturated with sublime ideas are lifted to great spiritual heights. The lives of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Bhishma, Nala, Harishchandra, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman, Yuddhishtira, Arjuna, Sita etc. are sources of spiritual inspiration for moulding our life, conduct and behaviour. Hindu mythology has advantages and disadvantages both; it stands on the minds of subtle and abstract teachings of the Vedas through stories and illuminating discourses and paves the way for men to lead a divine life and attaining perfection, freedom and immortality. Symbols are beneficial when viewed from the right angle of vision. It plays an important role in our material and spiritual life. Symbols are scientific and effective. In Hinduism the association of mantra with God makes it sacred and spiritual; by chanting it makes a man spiritually illumined. The word 'mantra' means "something by reflecting on which

a person is saved from danger or bondage of the world".

Concept:

In the historical development and present use of the concepts of symbolization, a variety of categories and relationships must necessarily be differentiated. Religious symbols are used to convey concepts concerned with humanity's relationship to the sacred or holy (and also to the social and material world (e.g., the *dharmachakra*, or wheel of the law, of Buddhism). This type of "secularized" symbol is rooted, to a degree, in the realm of religious symbolism. It functions in a manner similar to that of the religious symbol by associating a particular meaning with a particular sign. The rationalization of symbols and symbolical complexes as well as the rationalization of myth have been in evidence at least since the Renaissance. Religious symbol also embraces an abundantly wide variety of types and meanings. Allegory, personifications, figures, analogies, metaphors, parables, pictures (or, more exactly, pictorial representations of ideas), signs, emblems as individually conceived, artificial symbols with an added verbal meaning, and attributes as a mark used to distinguish certain persons all are formal, historical, literary, and artificial categories of the symbolical. The symbol indicates the need for communication and yet conceals the details and innermost aspects of its contents.

Meaning:

The word *symbol* comes from the Greek *symbolon*, which means contract, token, insignia, and a means of identification. Parties to a contract, allies, guests, and their host could identify each other with

the help of the parts of the *symbolon*. In its original meaning the symbol represented and communicated a coherent greater whole by means of a part. The symbol object, picture, sign, word, and gesture require the association of certain conscious ideas in order to fully express what is meant by them. To this extent it has both an esoteric and an exoteric, or a veiling and a revealing, function. The discovery of its meaning presupposes a certain amount of active cooperation.

Importance of symbols:

Furthermore, a symbol in its intermediary function has aspects of epistemology (theory of knowing) and ontology (theory of being). As a means of knowledge, it operates in a characteristically dialectical process of veiling and revealing truths. It fulfils an interpretative function in the process of effectively apprehending and comprehending religious experience. In doing so, the word, or symbol—with its meaning, contextual use, relationship to other types of religious expression, and interpretative connection with the various forms of sign, picture, gesture, and sound—plays an important part in the process of symbolical perception and reflection. Although the symbol is an abbreviation, as a means of communication it brings about—through its connection with the object of religion and with the world of the transcendent—not only an interpretative knowledge of the world and a conferral or comparison of meaning to life but also a means of access to the sacred reality. It may possibly even lead to a fusion, or union of some sort, with the divine. The importance of symbolical expression and of the pictorial presentation of religious facts and ideas has been confirmed, widened, and deepened both by the study of local cultures and religions and by the comparative study of world religions. Systems of symbols and pictures that are constituted in a certain ordered and determined relationship to the form, content, and intention of presentation are believed to be among the most important means of knowing and expressing religious facts. Such systems also contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of the relationships between human beings and the realm of the sacred or holy (the transcendent, spiritual dimension). The symbol is, in effect, the mediator, presence, and real (or intelligible) representation of the holy in certain conventional and standardized forms.

Process of Symbolization:

To trace the origin, development, and differentiation of a symbol is a complicated

process. Almost every symbol and picture in religion is at first either directly or indirectly connected with the sense impressions and objects of the human environment. Many are derived from the objects of nature, and others are artificially constructed in a process of intuitive perception, emotional experience, or rational reflection. In most cases, the constructions are again related to objects in the world of sense perception. A tendency toward simplification, abbreviation into signs, and abstraction from sense objects is quite evident, as well as a tendency to concentrate several processes into a single symbol. The forms and figures of symbolical thought can change into exaggerations and rank growths, however, and lead to transformations and hybrids—figures with several heads, faces, or hands—as exemplified in the statues and pictorial representations of the deities of India (e.g., the multiarmed goddess Kali).

The foundations of the symbolization process lie in the areas of the conscious and the unconscious, of experience and thought, and of sense perception, intuition, and imagination. From these arises the structure of religious symbolism. Sensation and physiological and psychological processes participate in the formation of the symbol structure. Extraordinary religious experiences and conditions, visions, ecstasy, and religious delirium brought about by intoxication, hallucinogenics, or drugs that produce euphoria and changes in consciousness must also be taken into consideration. The symbol itself, however, is intended as an objective concentration of experiences of the transcendent world and not as a subjective construction of a personally creative process. The process of rational conceptualization and structuralization, however, also plays a part in the origin and development of many symbols. There is a correlation between sense perception, imagination.

In the development of the symbol, religious experience, understanding, and logic are all connected, but each places different accents on the individual categories and species of symbol. Occasionally, religion is regarded as the origin and the product of certain established (or fundamental) symbols. In such cases the outcome of the process of the structuralization of religious consciousness would then be the establishment of a symbol that is generally applicable to a particular historical species of religion. Conversely, one could ask whether the experience and establishment of an individual or collective symbol by a creative personality or a community is not itself the establishment of a religion. If so, the classical

symbol that was developed at the time of the foundation of any one particular religion would then be constitutive for its origin and further development. In any event, the symbol belongs to the essence of humanity's coming to religious consciousness and to the formation of history's institutional religions. It plays a fundamental and continual part in the further growing of such religions and in the mental horizons of their followers.

Relation of symbols with the sacred:

The religious symbol may be, it is above all the experience of the sacred or holy, which belongs essentially to any concept of religion. The historical study of religions has shown that it is fundamentally the symbol that mediates and forms for the religious consciousness the reality and the claim of the holy. Religion is a system of relationships, a system of reciprocal challenges and responses, the principal correspondents of which are the sacred or holy and humanity. Though there are many forms of experience in which the sacred or holy is distinctly known and felt, the experience is often acquired in worship, in which this system of relationships is realized and continually renewed and in which the sacred or holy supposedly makes itself present. The details of worship serve to objectify and regulate in a perceptual and material manner the presupposed presence of the sacred or holy, of which the symbol and the picture are intended to be its materialization. In its material manifestation the sacred or holy is adapted to the perceptual and conceptual faculties of human beings. Viewed from the aspect of its holiness, the symbol originates in a process of mediation and revelation, and every encounter with it is supposed to bring about a renewed actualization and a continual remembrance of this revelation.

The actualization of the presence of the holy by means of symbolic representation can, in extreme cases, lead to an identification of the physical manifestations with the spiritual power symbolized in them. The symbol, or at least an aspect of it, is then viewed as the incarnated presence of the holy. The sacred stone, animal, plant, and drum and the totem symbol or the picture of ancestors all represent the sacred or holy and guarantee its presence and efficacy. The origin of many such symbols clearly indicates the identity that was presumed to have existed between the symbol and the sacred or holy. The symbol is understood to have a referential character. It refers to the reality of the sacred or holy that is somewhat

and somehow present. When the symbol is an indicator of the sacred or holy, a certain distance exists between them, and there is no claim that the two are identical. Short of actual identification, various degrees of intensity exist between the symbol and the spiritual reality of the sacred or holy. The symbol is a transparency, a signal, and a sign leading to the sacred or holy. The objects, gestures, formulas, and words used in meditation.

Objects related to religious symbols

Liturgical and ceremonial objects can also indicate or lead to the sacred or holy. Not only holy pictures and symbols but also lights, candles, lamps, vessels for holy materials, liturgical books, holy writings, vestments, and sacred ornaments are indicators of the sacred or holy. Liturgical vestments and masks are intended to transform the wearers, to remove them from the realm of the this-worldly, and to adapt them to the sphere of the sacred or holy; they help them to come into contact with the divine—for example, by obscuring sexual characteristics. They are signs of the function of the wearers and their relationships to the sacred or holy and to the profane world. Remembrance and imitation are the analogous and associative means of representing the reality and indestructibility of the sacred or holy and its power, which defends, protects from injury, bans evil, and guarantees salvation. Symbolic signs and pictures (e.g., masks; sex, animal, or plant symbols, such as the skulls or horns of animals) are placed on houses and sacred places to make present the saving and sanctifying power of the sacred or holy.

Relations of symbolism with rituals and social realm:

Myth or ritual-

The symbol has a long-established relationship with myth (sacred stories that define the human condition and humanity's relation to the sacred or holy). Often containing a collection of symbolic forms, actions, expressions, and objects, myths describe gods, demons, people, animals, plants, and material objects that are themselves bearers of symbolical meanings and intentions. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a myth and a coherent complex of symbols brought together in story form. The details and contexts of religious teaching, dogma, and theology also produce or form symbolic values or refer to traditional symbolic representations. Symbol structures and pictorial representations are brought into connection with dogma and theological statements. In worship, individual actions and objects used in

the ritual are given a symbolic meaning that transcends their immediate practical purpose. Magic, in its ritual, also uses various formations of symbols, pictures, and symbolical actions that may be seen as parallels to the distinctively religious use of symbols.

Social realm-

The field of symbolism and iconography shows a strong interdependence that existed between religion and other areas of culture that were later to become autonomous and profane (or secularistic). The social domain under the influence of religion develops its own symbolism for expressing its values and objectives. Conversely, religion often draws its symbols and pictorial forms from the social, political, and economic domains. Persons (e.g., king, father, mother, child, slave, brother) and conditions and structures in society and the state (e.g., government, a people, family, marriage, and occupation) all receive meaning as symbolical and pictorial motifs in myth and cult. The morals, law, administration of justice, and the customs and habits of a society contain religious symbols and symbolical actions, as in the anointing of a king and in the administering of the oath or ordeal or in the observance of traditions and customs associated with birth, marriage, and death.

Environmental significance of symbols in Hinduism

Asvattha-

The Asvattha, the holy fig tree is derived from Indra and is considered to be best among the trees. The eternal tree of life with its branches below and the roots above (God) is considered as Asvattha in Hindu scriptures. Under a celestial Asvattha tree, saints and Gods gather and preach. This tree has some magical powers; childless women worship and circumambulate it with a hope and faith of being granted children. The wood of this tree is used for preparing sacrificial fire.



Bilva Leaf-

The Bilva tree is used in the worship of Lord Siva and his consort. It represents a vegetal form; amulets out of Bilva tree are endowed with supernatural powers. Medicines prepared out of unripe bilva fruits are considered to be very effective for certain diseases. Considered to be very effective for certain diseases.

Siva Linga-

Linga meaning a mark or a symbol pointing to some inference. Siva linga is a symbol of lord Siva. Lord Siva is formless; he has no form of His own but every form or Linga is lord Siva. Linga has some mysterious power or Sakti, which induces concentration of the mind.



Aum-

It is the root mantra and primal sound from where all creation issues forth. It is associated with Lord Ganesha; its three syllables stand at the beginning and end of every sacred verse every human act.

Bull or Nandi-

Nandi is a bull on which Lord Siva rides. It represents virility and strength, the animal in man. In Maheswara or Siva temples there is a recumbent bull in front of the chief shrine with the head turned away from the deity and the gaze fixed on it. It is interpreted as individual soul with animal nature pulling it away from God but his grace pulling him back to Him. It symbolises dharma or moral law.





Cow-

Cow is considered to be sacred by the Hindus since ages. It is an offspring of a celestial cow Kamadhenu created by Sri Krishna from his body. In Hindu mythology, the earth is pictured as approaching God in form of cow. The Panchagavya or the five products of the cow are milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung is considered as sacred preparation in expiatory rites. Killing a cow is a heinous crime.

Elephant-

The elephant in Hindu religion is considered as Gaja which means God Himself. This is analysed from a Sanskrit word. The word ga means the goal that has to be reached and jay means place of origin or birth of universe. It symbolises as a royal mount, royal power and might.



Mayil or Mayur-

Mayur or peacock is lord Murugan's mount, swift and beautiful like Kartikkeya himself. The proud display of the dancing peacock symbolizes religion in full, unfolded glory; his shrill cry warns of approaching harm.

Kumbha or Kalasa-

The kumbha or kalasa signifying a pot filled with water and decorated with coconut leaves used in Hindu ritualistic worship. A deity is invoked for worship which forms its body. It is a symbol of Divine Mother.

Poorna Kumbha-

It is a metal pot consisting of sacred water and in its mouth a cluster of mango leaves. This is carried by the host in both the hands and shown in front of the visiting dignitary. Agamas don't use this as an upachara for the god and honoured for guests with royalty and ascetics.

Lotus-

The bud of this flower boons in water and unfolds itself into a beautiful flower. It works as a symbol of the universe coming out of the primeval waters and manifesting itself in its glory. It symbolises sun; it rises from the navel of Lord Vishnu and is the seat of Brahma the Creator. Sacredness is associated with Lotus. Psychic centres of our body is associated with rising of the kundalini power are pictured like lotuses.



Moon-

The moon is a by-product of by the milky ocean when churned by gods and demons for the sake of amrita or nectar. It is considered as a bowl containing the amrita that our ancestors or Gods drink. The moon represents the Cosmic Mind, the mind of Viratpurusa, the sum-total of created objects. It acts as a dwelling place of ancestors.

Salagrama-

The Salagrama is a blackish rounded stone with a hole is worshipped as an emblem of Vishnu. It has been found in the bed of river Gandaki. Within the hole, there are spirals which pictures the discus of Vishnu. Apart from temples, Salagrama are also worshipped at home which is felt like obligatory; it is endowed with mysterious powers. Worshipping it confers certain permanent benefits.



Sun-

Sun being the producer of energy of light, life is a symbol of creator. Famous Gayatri Mantra is addressed to God the creator in and through the orb of the sun. The sun represents the cosmic sacrifice from where the whole creation has evolved. The Upanishads describe it as a celestial door leading immortality.

Tulasi-

The Tulasi leaves and plants is supposed to have been born at the time of churning milky ocean that is considered to be dear to Lord Vishnu and often identified with his consort Lakshmi. It is present in the courtyard of Vrindavan which is believed to ward off the messengers of death. Tulasi is the purifier of sin its twigs are used in the funeral pyre. It is used as medicinal purposes.



Dhupa-

Dhupa is a scented stick burnt before the deity; the smoke spreads in the whole room. It works as a disinfectant, by burning this it denotes that the lord is all pervading and that He fills the whole universe by His living presence.

Sandal paste-

This is unique as it reminds the devotee that even at times in his difficulties should remain calm and patient. The devotee should not murmur when difficulties arise, rather remain cheerful and happy. Sandal paste when rubbed emanates sweetness and gentleness.



Figure 10: White Sandalwood



Prasada-

It is the sacred food offered to the Lord; Prasada gives us peace. During rituals the devotee offers sweet rice, fruits, jaggery, milk, coconut, plantain and other food items to the Lord and these are shared between the members of the house or the Bhaktas. Water, flowers and rice are also offered to the Lord during worship. The benefits of prasada and charanamrita is that it has a power to change entirely the outlook of man's life. It has the power to cure diseases and bring back to life dead persons; prasada destroys all pains and sins. It acts as an antidote for misery, pain and anxiety.

Objectives of the study:

1. To make a scientific investigation on the Relation of symbols with the sacred
2. To understand Relations of symbolism with rituals and social realm
3. To find out Environmental significance of symbols in Hinduism

Methodology:

The participants (N=100) for this study were drawn from a larger dataset (N =487) of Hindus in Howrah District of West Bengal. Initial screening items for the parent study were designed to ensure that all participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) age 18 years (b) caste (c) area of

residence. Data were collected between June and July 2022. Participants first responded to questions about their age, Caste and Area of Residence.

Result of the study:

Out of 100 respondents, 50% from urban area and 50% from rural area; among them 34% is from forward caste, 42% from Other Backward Caste and 24 from Scheduled Caste. 10% belongs to the age group of below 30, 22% belongs to 31-50, 68% belong to the age group of above 50.

From the primary data it is found that, Bengali Hindus mostly making use of the objects related to God, the Symbols. 78% of them assure, that the details of worship serve to objectify and regulate in a perceptual and material manner the presupposed presence of the sacred or holy, of which the symbol and the picture are intended to be its materialization. Most of them believes that 92% it is the material manifestation the sacred or holy is adapted to the perceptual and conceptual faculties of human beings. For more than 80% the symbol originates in a process of mediation and revelation, and every encounter with it is supposed to bring about a renewed actualization and a continual remembrance of this revelation.

Some of them less than 30% agree with identification of the physical manifestations with the spiritual power symbolized in them. 100% are of the opinion that, it is viewed as the incarnated presence of the holy. They are also of the view that; the sacred stone, animal, plant, and drum and the totem symbol or the picture of ancestors all represent the sacred or holy and guarantee its presence and efficacy as well as the origin of many such symbols clearly indicates the identity that was presumed to have existed between the symbol and the sacred or holy. 93% said, when the symbol is an indicator of the sacred or holy, a certain distance exists between them, and there is no claim that the two are identical. Short of actual identification, various degrees of intensity exist between the symbol and the spiritual reality of the sacred or holy along with the symbol is a transparency, a signal, and a sign leading to the sacred or holy. The objects, gestures, formulas, and words used in meditation.

Most of them 88% are of the opinion that, Myths are often containing a collection of symbolic forms, actions, expressions, and objects, myths describe gods, demons, people, animals, plants, and material objects that are themselves bearers of symbolical meanings and intentions. That's why sometimes difficult to distinguish between a myth

and symbols brought together in story. 98% of the respondents use actions and objects with some symbolic meaning that transcends their immediate practical purpose. Magic, in its ritual, also uses various formations of symbols, pictures, and symbolical actions that may be seen as parallels to the distinctively religious use of symbols.

Commonly used symbols in day to day life

| Symbols and its usage | | % |
|-----------------------|--|-----|
| <i>Siva Linga</i> | Siva linga is a symbol of lord Siva, Linga has some mysterious power or Sakti, which induces concentration of the mind. (models, pictures, statues) | 70% |
| <i>Aum</i> | It is associated with Lord Ganesha; it three syllables stand at the beginning and end of every sacred verse every human act. (Some pictures, statues, models etc) | 89% |
| <i>Bull or Nandi</i> | It represents virility and strength, the animal in man. (pictures, statues, models) | 70% |
| <i>Cow</i> | It is an offspring of a celestial cow Kamadhenu created by Sri Krishna from his body. (pictures, growing cow in home) | 89% |
| <i>Elephant</i> | It symbolises as a royal mount, royal power and might. (pictures, statues) | 75% |
| <i>Mayur</i> | The proud display of the dancing peacock symbolizes religion in full, unfolded glory; his shrill cry warns of approaching harm. (models, pictures) | 80% |
| <i>Kumbha</i> | The kumbha or kalasa signifying a pot filled with water and decorated with coconut leaves used in Hindu ritualistic worship. (keeping Kumba in home) | 53% |
| <i>Lotus</i> | It works as a symbol of the universe coming out of the primeval waters and manifesting itself in its glory. (pictures and models) | 67% |
| <i>Salagrama</i> | Apart from temples, Salagrama are also worshipped at home which is felt like obligatory | |
| <i>Sandal paste</i> | This is unique as it reminds the devotee that even at times in his difficulties should remain calm and patient.(put sandal paste) | 96% |
| <i>Prasada</i> | It is the sacred food offered to the Lord; Prasada gives us peace. During rituals the devotee offers sweet rice, fruits, jaggery, milk, coconut, plantain and other food items to the Lord | |

Conclusion:

Hindu scriptures are replete with metaphors containing deeper philosophical truths couched in symbolism immediately to ordinary individuals. In Vedas and the Upanishads are written in coded or symbolic language. Manifest creation also have manifest content which is visible to all and some hidden content that would not be so obvious to us unless we have some intuitive ability. The bidden part unravels itself to the extent we have withdrawn into ourselves, the depths of consciousness in moments of heightened awareness.

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