

Mythological Dimensions In The Selected Works Of Anita Nair, Anuja Chandramouli And Sally Kempton

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Abstract:-

Human beings, the founders of different religions and sects, hold their respective views, beliefs and value systems. Rites, Beliefs, rituals and religious practices differ in different religions, faiths and sects. Moreover, various religions relate spiritual entities to different mythologies. Indian mythology forms the backbone of Indian Writings in English. The present paper makes an attempt to study Hindu religious practices that project various incarnations of 'Goddess Shakti'. Representation of these incarnations and their worship in a mythological framework in the works of writers such as Anita Nair, Anuja Chandramouli and Sally Kempton has been looked into.

Key Words:- Belief, Mythology, Religion, Rituals.

The patrimonial aspect of sanctification in case of mythology is deeply entrenched in society. The idea of this concept has been well explained in the way 'how one has his/her outlook towards life as also presented by various writers. In Anita Nair's work *The Puffin Book of Magical Indian Myths*, there is a content of mythology related to the different incarnations of Lord Vishnu namely Vishnu's First Avatar- 'The Matsya', 'The Kurma', 'The Varada', 'The Narasimha' and 'The Vamana'. Other mythological characters like Vishwamitra, river Saraswati, Sukanya and Aswani have also been discussed by Anita Nair.

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel "The Namesake" affords a fine example of devout worship and rituals of Indian society. Gogol's family has deep credence on Goddess Shakti, as the whole family is presented venerating the Goddess Durga/Shakti devotedly on various occasions like Navratri.

“For the sake of Gogol and Sonia they celebrate, with progressively increasing fanfare, the birth of Christ ,an event the children look forward to far more than the worship of Durga and Saraswati”(Jhumpa Lahiri- 64)

Importance of Goddess Durga/Shakti:-

In Sanatana Dharma/ Hinduism, the consciousness of prevailing enlightenment of all times is Goddess Shakti/Durga. The indigenous/innovative aspect of a female is ‘Shakti’ according to Brahman. She is considered as a source/supreme of salvation and power. The whole universe is assumed to be her cosmos, as Goddess Durga is known to be the source of all destruction and creation of this universe, the soul-mate of Lord Shiva.

Destruction and creation being interlinked, Western philosophy takes the process of destruction and creation as one cycle. It is the belief that Goddess Shakti remains quiescent during the time of dissolution. Similar to the presence of a new plant within a seed of a tree, the whole universe lies in the cosmos of Goddess Shakti. At the time of the creation of the universe, the seed of creation is sprinkled which springs in the form of a flower called the universe. Time of destruction involves the withdrawal of every seed of creation in her lap till the next creation and evolution. Goddess Shakti is also called ‘Mula Prakriti’ or the divine energy. Goddess Shakti is the Goddess Saraswati (knowledge provider) and Goddess Lakshmi as well, that provides beauty and boon to all creatures. Another form in which she is worshipped is the “Mahavidya” form. The word ‘Mahavidya’ represents different aspects of wisdom, Goddess Shakti in different forms. These ‘Mahavidyas’, which are a total of ten in number holds great importance in Hinduism. The ‘Das Mahavidyas’ of Goddess Shakti are as under:-

1.) Maa Kali:-

Also known as the first ‘Mahavidya’ of Goddess Shakti and known to be above everything. Goddess Kali is the “time-devourer” and supreme of Kalikula systems.

Goddess Kali has been said to have appeared from the body of Lord Vishnu while he was asleep. During the sleep of Lord Vishnu, ‘Yoganidra’ woke him up to rescue the universe and Lord Brahma from the demons, Madhu and Kaitabha. Maa Kali is also known to have emerged as a result of the rage/temper of Goddess Durga on demons Chanda and Munda. Chanda and Munda attacked Goddess Durga which caused her face to turn into dark pigmentation, resulting in the appearance of Goddess Kali from her forehead. Goddess Kali is shown wearing a garland of demon’s skull and a belt of their hands on her waist, carrying the head of a demon in her one hand, a scythe in another. She embodies the

Goddess of protection and liberation for her pure-hearted devotees.

2.) Maa Tara:-

Maa Tara is said to be the second 'Mahavidya' of Goddess Shakti. Goddess Tara is said to be the provider of salvation, divine knowledge, and energy. Goddess Tara is blue complexioned and is said to have appeared during the time of 'Samudra Manthan' to save Lord Shiva from the devastating effects of 'Kaalkut' venom. She is portrayed as wearing a garland of skulls around her neck adorned with a half-moon on her forehead. Buddhism worships Maa Tara in 21 different forms.

3.) Maa Tripursundari:-

Maa Tripursundari is called the third 'Mahavidya' of Goddess Shakti. She is known to be the most beautiful female in the three worlds of this universe. She is also known as 'Tantric Parvati' or The 'Moksha Mukta' or 'Shodashi' or 'Lalita' in Puranas. She possesses a golden complexion and sits on a golden throne. She is the only 'Mahavidya' who possesses the power to grant salvation as well as wealth.

4.) Maa Bhuvneshwari:-

The fourth 'Mahavidya' of Goddess Shakti is called Goddess Bhuvneshwari. Goddess Bhuvneshwari has a golden and fair skin color. She is said to be adorned with red and yellow wardrobes handcrafted with gold jewelry. She has four arms and she sits on a golden throne. She is known to be the 'creator of this universe' as well as of Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Mahesha. Goddess Bhuvneshwari is the 'Mother Goddess' and the whole universe and cosmos are at her beck and call.

5.) Maa Bhairavi:-

Goddess Bhairavi is ranked 5th among the Das 'Mahavidyas'. Goddess Bhairavi has a fierce complexion and nature, who is also termed as "The Warrior Goddess". Considered the opposite of God Bhairava. Maa 'Bhairavi' carries a book and a rosary in her hands and is known to maintain the cycle of rebirth and death of this universe.

6.) Maa Chinnamasta:-

Goddess Chinnamasta holds the seventh position in 'Das Mahavidyas'. 'Goddess Chinnamasta' relates to the feature of dismantling her head to satisfy the thirst of the blood of her devotees Jaya and Vijaya, which was a result of black magic on both of them (Jaya and Vijaya). Maa Chinnamasta sports cruel looks. She carries a sword on one hand and a dismantled head in another with blood oozing out of the neck and falling into the mouths of Jaya

and Vijaya. Maa Chinnamasta is partially dressed with jewelry up to her limbs. Rati and Kamdev are said to be her vehicles.

7.) Maa Dhumavati:-

The seventh 'Mahavidya' of Goddess Shakti is considered to be Goddess Dhumavati. Dhumavati Goddess is also called the "Widow Goddess" with dark brown smoky skin. She represents anger, misery, fear, and thirst. She carries a winnowing basket in one hand and showers boons and knowledge with the other. When she winnows her basket, the universe ends.

8.) Maa Baglamukhi:-

Maa Baglamukhi is also called 'Pitambara' or the Goddess with a yellow or golden complexion. She is the eighth 'Mahavidya'. She is adorned with yellow wardrobes and jewelry, holding a mace in one hand and stretching the tongue of demon 'Madanasura' in the other. She is portrayed sitting on a crane or a golden throne. This form of Goddess is said to paralyze the enemies of her devotees, and those who say unkind words. She is also known as the Goddess in Puranas who is worship by Kubera (The Lord of Wealth in Hinduism) to gain wealth and prosperity.

9.) Maa Matangi:-

The Green Goddess or Matangi is called the ninth 'Mahavidya'. She is also named as 'Tantric Saraswati' and the Prime Minister of Goddess Lalita. Maa Matangi stands with four hands holding a scimitar, in one hand, skull in second, Veena in the third hand, and is known to bestow boon with her fourth hand.

10.) Maa Kamala:-

She is also called the 'Lotus Goddess' having a benevolent expression and skin color. She wears golden wardrobes. She is the one who protects her devotees from all kind of fears.

To conclude, Goddess Shakti takes on different forms as presented in mythology and is worshipped in different forms in Hinduism. India, a land of diversity celebrates numerous festivals as per the beliefs and convictions of different sections of society, religious groups and sects. 'Navratri' is one of the very famous festivals which are celebrated especially by the Hindu community of India. 'Navratri' is a ten-day and nine nights festival that is celebrated to honor Goddess Shakti/ Durga. Different sects of Indian society celebrate this festival for different reasons. Though 'Navratri' is celebrated four times a year, the 'Navratri' celebration of the 'Sharada' season is solemnised during September and October and the 'Chaitra Navratri' celebration of the spring season during March and April. 'Magha Navratri' is celebrated during the time of

January and February months in a lunar period. The festival of "Basant Panchami" to honor Goddess 'Saraswati' is celebrated on the fifth day of 'Magha' Navratri. On the day of 'Basant Panchami', Goddess Saraswati is worshipped with music, writing, kite-flying, and art. Lord 'Kama Deva' who is considered to be the God of Love in Hinduism is also worshipped in some regions of India during this time. This 'Magha' Navratri is limited to individuals or provinces. 'Ashadha Navratri', another type of 'Navratri' is celebrated during 'Ashadha' months of the Hindu calendar in June and July.

Northern regions of India celebrate 'Navratri' by performing every chapter of 'Ramleela' on a temporarily constructed stages or temples or 'pandals' by a team of artists. In 2008, UNESCO has marked the Hindu culture of festive entertainment arts as 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. The recitation of the Hindu texts like songs, narration, and dialogues of 'Ramcharitamanas' which has been authored by 'Tulsidas' are included in this celebration. Cities like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Madhuvani, Katra, Vrindavan, and Almora are known for their excellence in this field. Various vices and virtues of humanity are presented in this religious enactment. People of diverse caste, creeds, and colors join and help in different events during the celebration like setting lights, effigies and making the performers ready for their performance. The province of Jammu is well-known for its Navratri celebration. Shri Vaishno Devi Shrine Board Katra and Directorate of Tourism Jammu promote this venerated celebration of Navratri. A large crowd pays obeisance in the Vaishno Devi temple of Katra in this festival. The nine nights of 'Navratri' celebrate the triumph of Goddess Durga/ Shakti against deception. In homes in a poised place, a pot called 'Ghatasthana' is placed at a pious place which is a lamp lighted for nine nights and ten days. This sanctified lamp represents the universe and its uninterruptedness, the symbol 'Devi Durga' also called "Adi Shakti".

Another place that is famous for its 'Navratri' celebration is the autumn 'Navratri' of Bihar. The 'Sitamarhi' part of Bihar has the grand celebration of spring Navratri with its 'Ramnavmi' fair. Goddess 'Sita' is known to be born in the place of Sitamarhi. To honor Goddess 'Sita' and Lord 'Rama', a fair is organized in this place of Sitamarhi. This fair is an attraction for tourists and local people for its handicrafts, kitchen, house ware and cattle trading along with festive performances in temples. The coastal state of Goa is known for its 'Navratri' celebration with a copper pitcher which contains nine different kinds of grains placed in the temples of Lord Krishna and Goddess Durga in the 'Ashwin' month of Hindus. The holy nights of 'Navratri' are celebrated by performing discourses related to Hinduism with folk musical instruments of

music. The images of Goddess Durga which are adorned with silver swing are placed in celebration. It is called 'Makhar' in the Konkani language. This festival is also called 'Makharotsav' locally which is known for its last night celebration named as 'Makhararati'.

Conclusion:-

Diverse interpretations of epics can be observed in various rituals and customs practiced in different parts of Indian society. The various sects of society have a custom of passing these rituals from one generation to another through visual, written and oral means of story telling & retelling in various ways. Similarly different authors have also presented these mythological stories in their own ways. For example:- The various manifestations of Goddess Shakti have been well explained by the various authors like Anita Nair, Sally Kempton and Anuja Chandramouli. These authors have presented various manifestations of Goddess Shakti like the bestower of wealth, liberation, salvation and spiritual transformation of humanity. Indian culture hums with the vibrant resonance of diverse interpretations of epics, interwoven with intricate rituals and customs passed down through generations. This rich tapestry extends to the captivating figure of Goddess Shakti, whose multifaceted essence has enthralled countless devotees and inspired profound explorations by authors like Anita Nair, Sally Kempton, and Anuja Chandramouli. Each retelling, each manifestation, adds another dimensions to the ever-evolving understanding of this powerful divinity.

Shakti, the embodiment of cosmic feminine energy, pulsates through the heart of various Hindu sects. Through generations, her stories have been breathed into existence through vibrant visual portrayals in temple murals, meticulously inscribed narratives in ancient texts, and captivating oral retellings that dance on the tongues of storytellers. This vibrant transmission ensures that the essence of Shakti transcends time and space, becoming an integral part of the living cultural fabric.

Authors like Anita Nair, Sally Kempton, and Anuja Chandramouli embark on unique voyages of exploration, enriching our understanding of Shakti's multifaceted nature. Nair, steeped in the rich traditions of Kerala, unveils 'Shakti' as the benevolent 'amma,' the nurturing mother who showers blessings upon her devotees. Kempton, drawing inspiration from Tantric traditions, presents Shakti as the transformative 'liberator', guiding souls towards spiritual awakening. Chandramouli, delving into Vedic wisdom, illuminates Shakti as the ultimate "source," the primordial energy from which all creation has emanated. These diverse interpretations weave a magnificent tapestry, revealing the boundless nature of Shakti. She is the bountiful Lakshmi,

showering devotees with prosperity, the fierce Durga, vanquishing demons and restoring order, the tranquil Parvati, embodiment of love and devotion. She is also the enigmatic Kali, representing the transformative power of change. Each manifestation reflects a facet of her infinite being, offering solace, strength, and guidance to her children. Ultimately, understanding Shakti goes beyond intellectual interpretations. It lies in the heart's resonance, the intuitive grasp of her presence in the pulsating rhythm of nature, the creative spark within, and the unyielding power of transformation. The journey of exploring Shakti becomes a personal pilgrimage, leading each seeker towards their own unique understanding of this multifaceted goddess. This glimpse into the multifaceted world of Shakti is just a starting point. The tapestry of her existence is vast and ever-evolving, inviting us to delve deeper, engage with diverse interpretations, and ultimately, encounter her essence in the depths of our own being.

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