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ANALYSIS OF FLOOD MYTHS AMONG GREAT AND LITTLE TRADITIONS

Abstract

Across all cultures folklore has an expression of existence comprising the universal value of collectivity and brotherhood and togetherness. Religions like Hinduism, Christianity, Ancient Greeks and Aztecs and several other tribal groups around the globe have diverse cultural histories. But one mythical story has in common about the great deluge. Although these stories are different in detail of events or in specific plot, the premise remains remarkably the same. The recurring theme of flood and myths of a giant deluge constitute an underlying and important theme in all the classic literature as well as in oral tradition. Even Indian classical writings have evidence of flood myth narratives along with the primitive folkloric traditions, especially in the tribal minorities of central India. It can be seen by interpretation of certain characteristics of mythology that are almost universal and have a wide range of distribution and acceptance in all forms of societies. The purpose of this paper would be focusing specifically on the classical collection of flood myths. There would be an attempt on identifying and analyzing a plurality among classical flood myths by selecting the four flood myths from the perspective of great tradition and little tradition in which two are from great and two are from little traditions. Here I am focusing upon comparing and analyzing the deluge stories from Europe and India. By comparing the folklore stories of Bhil and Kamar deluge as little tradition and from great tradition Hindu and Judeo-Christian deluge. However, the original historical occurrence of events can be observed through the modification and enhancement in the myth from generation to generation.

Keywords: *Folklore, Flood, Myth, Deluge, Noah's Ark*

Introduction

The most live through and universal of the catastrophe myths like flood, fire, drought and plague is associated with flood myth. Its geographical location may differ according to each culture but prevalence indicates that destruction of the world by water is a revolving theme (Birrell, 1997, pp. 213-59). The recurring theme of flood and myths of a giant deluge constitute an

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underlying and important topic in all the classic literature as well as in oral tradition. Even Indian classical writings have evidence of flood myth narratives along with the primitive folkloric traditions, especially in the tribal minorities of central India. It can be seen by interpretation of certain characteristics of mythology that are almost universal and have a wide range of distribution and acceptance in all forms of societies. Among all the traditions across the earth there is nothing so general, so correctly to show what can be developed from the same tale according to the different spiritual character of a person as the flood traditional tale (Rehwinkel 1951: 129). The purpose of this paper would be focusing specifically on the classical collection of flood myths. There would be an attempt on identifying and analyzing a plurality among classical flood myths by selecting the four flood myths in which two are from great traditions and two are from little traditions. By comparing the folklore stories of both India and Europe it is found that India is a leading country in folklore stories among Asian countries. In the context of pan Indian folklore it has the characteristic of multiplicity and can be questionable. Concluding remarks would be made by the finding of the comparative analysis at the last of the paper.

Theoretical Framework

Little tradition and great tradition are sort of a conceptual approach that helps in the study of social change in deluge myths across different cultures throughout the world. This conceptual framework was created by Robert Redfield while studying the villages in Mexico later on, this approach was utilized by McKim Marriott and Milton Singer in conducting their intensive study in Indian villages. "Civilization" and "Social Organization of Tradition" are two major propositions in this approach. According to evolutionary view, a civilization is built upon two stages; firstly, Orthogenetic evolution and secondly on heterogenetic contacts. Orthogenetic evolution suggests changes occurred in those aspects where internal or indigenous factors are in charge of such changes. The heterogenetic contacts suggest changes occurred due to external contact or any kind of interference of outside civilization (Nitisha, n.d.)

In all civilizations, social structures can be differentiated into two level

1. The Folk and Peasantry
2. The Elites

The Folk and Peasantry depicts the little tradition. The second segment the elites depicts the great tradition. The great tradition incorporates the traditions contained in epics like Vedic texts, Old Testament and other biblical texts. While the little tradition, moreover, is local tradition of great tradition customized according to the regional and village affairs.

Redfield (1962) stated that "tradition" has always been dominated by

structure of tradition approach. Generally, this approach requires studying interaction between dominant cultural traditions at the core of complex civilized societies and local folklore societies. According to (Marriott 1955) a great tradition beholds its dominance to two processes. The initial process is *universalization* by which Marriot implies the carrying forward of the elements which are existing in the little traditions in the rural villages into an institute which is “universalized” consciousness into great tradition. The second process is *parochialization* which means “downward spread” from great tradition to little tradition (villages). Both universalization and parochialization are distinguished by transformation and there were some sort of gaps in communication which the local communities identified and filled on their own. If we see comparatively, the concept of universalization and parochialization explains the process of cultural change which is understood by Sanskritization when universalization comes very nearer to the concept of parochialization. Here in this conceptual framework the Kamar and Bhil deluge has been placed as little tradition and The Hindu deluge and Old Testament deluge has been placed as great tradition for comparative analysis.

The Hindu Deluge (Manu)

One morning when Manu was washing his hands, a fish came into the hands of that sage. It spoke to him rear me; I shall save you if you save me. A flood will wash away the entire living creature across the earth. Firstly, Manu kept that fish in a jar. After some days it grew out of the jar so he dug a pit later into the sea. There fish told there will be a deluge in coming years and advised him to construct a ship for the future. When the deluge happened, the fish came to rescue, he tied the rope of the ship to its horn. They safely reached the northern mountains. The fish advised him to tie the rope of the ship to the tree so it doesn't drift away. As all the creatures were wiped out of the earth, he wanted to revive the human population in the desire of the offspring he started to make offerings to the god. Butter, whey, curd and butter with water were offered. Through this woman rose a year later. She said I'm the daughter of the person who begat me. All the blessings invoked through me make use of me all that shall be granted through me. Along with her he offered God through sacrifice and worshipping wishing for the offspring. Through her the new race was generated later they were known as the race of the Manu. (Gaster 1969).

The Old Testament Deluge (Noah's Ark)

In Hebrew it is mentioned that once men lived at ease that the harvest from a single season crop could last for forty years. Children used to be born only in a few days instead of taking nine years to be born and could easily learn how to walk and talk. Even people used to command extra celestial bodies like the sun and moon. During this period made numerous sins because of this god got very angry with humans so he decided to destroy the old order

with a deluge. God wanted to give one more chance to the human kind so he instructed Noah to warn them and to mend their ways. Noah warned them for the next 120 years but wicked men didn't listen and mocked him. During the last week Noah was building the Ark through Adam's book which he received from angel Raziel. Later that week male water came from the sky and female water came from the ground causing the flooding of the whole surface area. Noah took 365 species of reptiles and 32 species of the birds with him on the Ark along 8 peoples from his family. Falsehood as well as misfortune too took refuge on the Ark. Sinners also gathered around the Ark but they were turned down by the wild beasts that were guarding the door. On the ark Noah fed all the animals for one year which in turn took toll over all others as the food was scarce. On the tenth day of the month of Tammuz, Noah sent a bird (Raven) which didn't return after someday a dove, who came back with an olive leaf plucked from a mount of olives in Jerusalem. (Ginzberg 1909). Noah sacrificed some clean animals and birds to God, God got pleased with the devotion of Noah, in return God promised not to destroy living kinds with the flood in the future, giving the rainbow as a sign of this agreement. Animals inclined towards wilderness and became apt food, and Noah and his family later repopulated the human population on earth. (Wickedness in the World, n.d.).

The Kamar Deluge

Mahadeo was determined to wipe out the entire old world with the new. It is said that Mahadeo was sure that it would take around five days to wipe out the entire world with flood. The news first broke out among animals then it passed to humans by a deer. One old man made a huge boat out of sandalwood near the sea-shore. On that boat he constructed a number of the rooms. There were around six rooms there in the first one he kept the water, in the second one he kept fuel which could be in the form of woods. The third one was meant for cooking and the fourth one was meant for defecation. The two other rooms were meant for living; later he was his son and daughter and filled that boat with the entire necessary item which would last for at least twelve years. It seems like he doesn't want to save himself or his old lady. That's why he locked the houseboat from outside along with his son and daughter only. After the fourth day comes the fifth day of thunder and destruction which brought endless water lightning and rain from all the four directions which wiped out all the living beings on the earth, only a boat made up of sandalwood floating among the chaos. After the "OLD" is gone Mahadeo wanted to create the "NEW". Then he sends 12 lakhs of *kauru* birds in search of the seeds of earth and man for the creation of new life. They flew for twelve years over the endless ocean of water, some of them died, some survived by lounging over the sandalwood houseboat.

Mahadeo called a crab from the sea to find any seeds of the earth. After some time from the bottom of the sea, the crab brought an earthworm

(Kechwa) from his teeth, the last seed of the earth found. Through this little seed sufficient part of the earth emerged. For the creation of the sky, he created four pillars in opposite directions to each; later he tied the skin of the black cow on the post of these pillars which covered the whole world. The sky was made by the skin of the black cow and the shining nails were placed for the creation of the stars. As the earth is complete but there were no sun and moon for the indication of day and night. For that Mahadeo gave moon from his head then he asked the *Pandavas* for their suns. They gave their four Suns which were arising from each direction but it made earth too hot for survival later Mahadeo asked them to withdraw the three suns. For the creation of human beings Mahadeo reared the children from that house-boat because he wasn't able to find any other seed for the creation of human life. He reared them like their own son and daughter. Later Mahadeo taught the boy how to produce different crops out of nature. The first one was *Dahi* cultivation, later the *Paddy* in the month of *Asar*. For the protection of the cultivated field from the invasion of wild animals Mahadeo made the boy and girl sleep together in the field in order to create the human race in full-fledged manner which led to the pregnancy of the girl. Usually, it takes nine months for the development of the foetus but this time it took only nine steps. The girl gave birth to thousands of the children, ultimately, she died in the process. Mahadeo succeed in reviving the living life on the earth. (Dube 1951).

The Bhil Deluge

It is said that Bhagwan (God) created earth out of two washer men. They were both brother and sister. The girl whenever goes to draw water from the river, she had a habit of feeding the fishes with rice. Due to her good gesture one day a fish came near to her and asked what her desires were? What do you want from life? She replied that I don't know. The fish told her that there will be a deluge soon. Make a cage for yourself and your brother and don't forget to keep some pumpkin seeds, water and a cock. The rain along with the thunder destroyed the whole earth along with the living creatures. The god inquired if anyone had survived. Then he heard the crowing of the cock. God himself went on to near the cage and asked both of them who warned you regarding the deluge. The girl told him about the encounter with the fish. The god called the fish and asked her why you warned them about the deluge. The fish lied first but later confessed the truth because of the lie the god cut off the tongue of the fish. From the tongue of the fish leeches took their origin. It is said that because of that incident till now they don't have a tongue. The god turned both brother and sister opposite to each other and made them husband and wife. This was the way to make them realize that they are going to be progenitors of the human race.

It is pretty clear that Bhil borrowed the story from Hinduism. Though this version of myth of the deluge has almost the same characters, the first

Brahman (Manu) were left out and only human couples established in their own version. This depicts that Bhils created this character in order to counter Brahman ascetic, whose obligation was to remain pure by washing himself from holy water. One of the main reasons they portrayed this couple as washer men is because generally, they live near the water and this would establish a natural connection with the water creatures. This can be an example which establishes how while Sanskritizing into Hinduism, they often intact themselves towards the essential part of their own culture. (Koppers 1940/1941).

Similarity at Structural Level:

Man has become degenerate and wicked. There shall be a new beginning. The old order should be wiped off along with the previous race; the deluge purifies the world for all its sins and iniquity. These arguments are consistent throughout among these deluge stories. Could it be more reasonable if anything happens rather than the total destruction? What was its purpose? This indicates that for sin man must be punished. Instances of warning are mentioned; despite full blown pouring rain everywhere; sufficient delay permitted; who should be saved and how? All these saving mechanisms are mentioned sufficiently. The well ordered and systematic origin of the earth and sky, fabricated in certain days. The planned progress of the world's history from last surviving people as there were no sort of mental consciousness regarding incest. The construction of a boat or an ark and the exact statement of the context of roping the boat along with a mountain (Harper 1894). All the deluge stories inculcate the idea of minimizing evil from life and positive glorification of human relation with nature. Besides that promoting the moral compass of forgiveness, so does all these deluge myths.

Observation and Concluding Remarks

The dissimilarities in reference to the spirit and motive are distinguishable, the Hindu deluge story is obviously anthropomorphic including the representation of the gods like fish and a woman rose up from the offering made to the god. While the Anthropomorphic element in the Old Testament's deluge is very less and never twisted. When one reads the Hindu deluge story and discovers no teaching or greater lesson, while in the Hebrew story there has been account for the greatest teachings like punishment for sins, liberation for being righteous. This shows not all great traditions are relatable in terms of myth's structural level. S.C Dube viewed that a little and great tradition are relatable but there is no specific definition but there is no specific definition but there are many great or near great traditions, in which each one operates with its accepted texts and ethical codes. Despite that the great tradition – little tradition framework would not be able to make proper justice on the role and significance of regional, national or at western tradition, each one of them are powerful in its own way (Singh 1973: 15).

Not all the deluge stories are similar, however the common theme of mass destruction of the world by flood is there in many religions and cultures. But in the case of Noah's ark and Bhil's stories include how God became angry and furious over humans for their arrogance and decided to bring catastrophic water calamity in order to wipe out the whole order and only the chosen were left out to repopulate the earth again. In both Noah's ark and Manu's story the ark and boat came to rest on a mountain that depicts the immense depth of the water, so in order to survive, they had to lead to the higher altitudes. The survival of Noah's family and Manu's is very coincidental and presumably the origin of the new human race. In the flood myth from the Old Testament, God who put aside Noah by instructing him to construct an Ark the same as the Hindu version of the story, it is also through divine intervention in the form of the god Vishnu that mankind is safeguarded from total wipeout. In each folklore tale there is a sort of divine prophecy to the main character of the deluge that a calamity is coming to which everyone else is uninformed. (Barton 1916). If you see in contrast to the great tradition in both tribal instances (little tradition) it is a fish and deer (animals) are chosen as divine informers who announce the coming of the deluge. The relative idea of repopulating the race is quite controversial as well as similar in all accounts. As God, he instructed them to repopulate by incest. (Levi-Strauss 1955) created a hypothesis which solidifies our argument: the basic units of a myth are not outlying relations but *bundles of social relations* only by putting these bundles together, these social relations can be placed to use and combined so as to bring out a meaning. This mere recurrence of various patterns in various regions separated geographically and culturally tells us commonality in the human psyche.

The Indian great tradition was always continuous with the little tradition that can be found in its various regions, villages, tribes and caste. It is because the indigenous civilization has been tailored out of previous folk and regional cultures. Another reason of this cultural consciousness which has been formed across the Indian subcontinent was with the help of certain elements i.e., Sacred texts and sacred objects like totems and other representatives of cultural transmission like brahmins (Singh 1973: 14).

There are striking accounts of differences and similarity when compared with great tradition to little tradition. Leading sociologist G.S Ghurye has noticed that the tribes have shown a habitual tendency to look upon themselves as Hindus or as people intently related with Hinduism. For instance, it's a tendency in Hindu religion of mystifying animals like fish to be denoted as Vishnu in the form of fish while in Bhil's it's not like that they didn't mystify animals, it's just a fish with good intentions. In another instance the tribe makes the flood look local and the biblical and Hindu's myth makes it general. The little tradition has a conception of local deity or supreme god (Mahadeo) in strong contrast with the general idea of single monotheism by Hinduism and Judeo-Christians.

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