

MYTH AND MEMORY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE**Mr. Mohit Patel ¹**<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17355048>**Review:01/10/2025,****Acceptance:01/10/2025****Published:12/10/2025**

Abstract:: Indian mythology and folklore, although often intersecting, are distinct yet harmoniously balanced expressions of culture. Mythology, grounded in religious scriptures such as the Vedas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata, provides cosmological myths, divine histories, and moral paradigms shaping philosophical and religious perception. Folklore, transmitted orally via narrative, ballad, song, and proverb, records the lived traditions, sociological values, and local knowledge of diverse societies. In comparing Indian mythology and folklore as an approach to mapping out their thematic convergences and divergences, the present paper explores how mythology performs universal truth through divine archetype and folklore attribute's local identity, everyday conflict, and cultural tenacity. In a comparison of chosen myths and folktales, the essay highlights their common purpose as be speakers of cultural continuity but differentiating their disparate roles in making up the pluralistic heritage of India.

Key terms: Indian Mythology, Folktales, Oral Tradition, Cultural Identity

Introduction

India has been commonly referred to as a land of tales, where the present and past meet in a constant flow of stories. Both mythology and folklore are these two allied forms in which these stories are mainly expressed. Mythology is concerned with the sacred stories embedded in India's sacred scriptures like Vedas, Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. These stories describe cosmic origins, divine order, and moral values. Folklore, by contrast, exists primarily in oral traditions—tales, songs, riddles, and ballads—that circulate within communities and reflect lived experiences, cultural practices, and localized wisdom.

They are not absolutely exclusive and not absolutely inclusive either. They are actually in a constant fluid interplay: myths acquire folklores in oral traditions, and folklore incorporates mythological themes. In the cultural universe of India, as A.K. Ramanujan perceives it, "there is a plurality of traditions—folk, classical, and written—that overlap and dialogue with one another" (Ramanujan 48).

This essay tries a comparative examination of Indian mythology and folklore on the basis of their origins, functions, themes, and impact on cultural identity. It argues that while mythology generalizes archetypes of the divine and sacred order, folklore particularizes human experience, durability, and social critique. Synergistic, and correlative, they form the narrative weave of India, ensuring the carrying over of cultural memory and values from generation to generation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study thematic correspondences and divergences between folklore and mythology in India.
2. To analyse how mythology and folklore shape cultural memory and identity.
3. In pursuit of researching their influence upon Indian literature, art, and theatre traditions.

¹ Mohit Patel, Research Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Emai-Id: mohitpatel780@gmail.com, Mobile: 7843846211

4. To highlight the coexistence of divine archetypes and human struggles within these traditions.

Methodology

The research methodology adopted for the paper is comparative and qualitative. It is established on primary sources of mythology such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and certain Puranas, and folk tales from the Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, and oral traditions of regions. The secondary materials are research work on Indian folklore and mythology such as works of Wendy Doniger, A.K. Ramanujan, Stuart Blackburn, and so forth. The analysis employs textual correlation and cultural interpretation contextualizing mythology and folklore in the context of society and culture in which it is situated.

Discussion and Analysis

Sources and Transmission

Myth

Mythological accounts have their origins in religious scriptures and are linked with ritual performances and religious systems. For instance, the Rig Veda also includes hymns that recount cosmic wars between deities like Indra and Varuna and that were chanted while conducting Vedic sacrifices (Doniger 34). In much the same way, epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata circulated orally but came early to be systematized as authoritative compositions with scriptural sanctity.

Folklore

Folklore continues to draw upon oral traditions and is passed down through multiple generations without assuming a firm scriptural form. Folk song and narrative and riddle as in the Panchatantra or oral traditions among tribals vary with constant accommodation to new situations. Richard Dorson concludes that folklore "exists in variation, with each retelling embodying the creativity of the performer and the needs of the community" (25).

Themes and Representation

Myths as Archetypes

Myths entail gods, semi-gods, and heroes who represent universal principles. In Ramayana, Rama is the perfect son, husband, and king and illustrates dharma (righteousness). In Mahabharata, Krishna is the embodiment of divine wisdom and cosmic play (lila). These beings exist on a cosmic level and are religious and moral ideals (Doniger 67).

Folklore as Human Experience

Folklore often touches upon daily hardships, comedy, and survival. Legends about Tenali Raman or Birbal denote quick-wittedness and intelligence as weapons of protest against power. Animal tales in the Panchatantra convey human virtues and sins using allegory. Folktales from the tribals, as among the Gonds and the Santals, emphasize ecological knowledge, shared solidarity, and the oneness of people with nature (Blackburn and Flueckiger 102).

Roles in Society

Myth

Myths sanction religious practices, account for cosmic order, and provide morals. For example, the churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan) mythology accounts for both the creation of divine nectar and the certainty of conflict between evil

and good (Narayan 59). Myths also contain philosophical discourses, for example, the Bhagavad Gita, which discusses matters of morals and duty.

Folklore

Folk tales, however, are a reflection of culture and are a commentary upon hierarchies in society, sexual relations, and political power. Folk tales featuring women often challenged patriarchal norms with stories of heroines outsmarting domineering husbands or in-laws (Narayan 112). Trickster tales overturn power relations with a valuation of quick-witted over physical strength and are an icon of resistance for the powerless.

Intersecting and Overlapping

Folk tales and myths frequently intersect.

- The childhood stories of Krishna as portrayed in the Bhagavata Purana are mainly as oral song and festival hymn.
- The folk tales of the region generally encompass myths, with a blurring of sacred and profane. For instance, in a large number of South Indian folk tales, deities like Mariamman or Ayyanar are reinterpreted as village patrons rather than far-off cosmic deities.
- Suggests Stuart Blackburn, "myths are folklorised as they enter popular performance traditions, while folktales are mythologised as they become allied with divine approval" (Blackburn and Flueckiger 15).

Effect upon Literature, Fine Arts, and Performing

- **Writings:** Classical dramas in Sanskrit, medieval devotional writing, and contemporary novels borrow themes from mythology and folk narrative. Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas re-enacts the Ramayana in front of a vernacular reading public, interpolating mythology and folklore.
- **Dance:** Kathakali and Bharatanatyam are dance dramas that enact myths, while folk theatres like Jatra of Bengal and Yakshagana of Karnataka enact myths as well as localized folk stories amongst people of regions.
- **Visual Arts:** Temple sculptures narrate mythological events, while tribal paintings such as Warli or Gond art depict folklore, often incorporating mythic motifs.

Indian mythology and folktales are two intersecting but independent streams of cultural narrative. Mythology universalizes divine archetypes, cosmic myths, and moral order, whereas folklore specifies human existence, folk wisdom, and social commentary. They form an energizing and multiple narrative tradition supporting India's cultural memory.

Mythology enshrines religious and philosophical ideals, folklore captures the voice of the oppressed, the quotidian, and the vernacular. Their comparative analysis shows us the richness of Indian narrative, in which divinity and humanity, sacred and lay, universal and localized are integrated in antagonistic yet productive tension. Through persistent circulation in oral performance, literary and visual art, mythology and folklore ensure that India's cultural heritage is maintained as vibrant, variable, and pertinent.

References

1. Blackburn, Stuart H., and Joyce B. Flueckiger. Oral Epics in India. University of California Press, 1989.
2. Doniger, Wendy. The Hindus: An Alternative History. Penguin, 2009.
3. Dorson, Richard M. Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction. University of Chicago Press, 1972.

4. Narayan, Kirin. Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.
5. Ramanujan, A. K. Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two Languages. Pantheon, 1991.

R-5-Mohit patel

Turnitin

Document Details

Submission ID

trn:oid::2945:318843928

Submission Date

Oct 15, 2025, 8:09 AM GMT+5

Download Date

Oct 15, 2025, 8:10 AM GMT+5

File Name

unknown_filename

File Size

189.5 KB

3 Pages

1,303 Words

7,837 Characters



Page 1 of 6 - Cover Page

Submission ID - trn:oid::2945:318843928



Page 2 of 6 - Integrity Overview

Submission ID - trn:oid::2945:318843928

4% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

Filtered from the Report

- Bibliography
- Quoted Text
- Cited Text
- Small Matches (less than 14 words)

Match Groups

- 3 Not Cited or Quoted - 4%
Matches with neither in-text citation nor quotation marks
- 0 Missing Quotations - 0%
Matches that are still very similar to source material
- 0 Missing Citation - 0%
Matches that have quotation marks, but no in-text citation
- 0 Cited and Quoted - 0%
Matches with in-text citation present, but no quotation marks

Top Sources

- 4% Internet sources
- 0% Publications
- 0% Submitted works (Student Papers)

Integrity Flags

0 Integrity Flags for Review

Our system's algorithms look deeply at a document for any inconsistencies that would set it apart from a normal submission. If we notice something strange, we flag it for you to review.

A Flag is not necessarily an indicator of a problem. However, we'd recommend you focus your attention there for further review.