

Influence of Cultural and Mythological Folklore on Indian Societal Values

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ABSTRACT

Moral conscience is an evident feature of the human condition. Moral awareness is vital for a peaceful society. Even gods are said to incarnate to restore morality and peace in society. Many religious teachers and philosophers have been interested in the intellectual basis of morality throughout history. India is a society that is profoundly rooted in its religion, but it is also important to note the religious teachings. Many religions in the subcontinent centre on norms of behaviour that liberate an individual's mind and provide them with the ability to navigate through life's many challenges. It is critical to recognise the diversity of Indians, and hence the diversity of civilizations. One item practised in one location does not imply that it will be practised in another; variances and distinctions occur, whether they be cultural practises or mythical beliefs, but the substance of the instruction stays the same. The basis of Indian ethics may indeed be found in philosophical and theological ideas expressed via worship, prayers, and goals and principles that guided man's existence in society. When we talk about Indian ethics, we can't ignore the close tie that exists between ethics and Hinduism or any other religion. Ethics and religion are inextricably linked, and whatever the religion, it has some system of morals for guiding its adherents. As a result, Indian ethics is an essential component of Hinduism and other faiths of Indian heritage. Indian ethical values and concepts can be found in the Vedas, various Indian works of literature, and other religious teachings. Morality, like religion and art, is a living institution that anybody may accept. Morality is the deliberate application of specific norms of behaviour established by persons recognised as authorities. Because Hindu predecessors in India were spiritual, they focused their emphasis on a life beyond death.

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INTRODUCTION

A society's myths and tales are often the foundation upon which its culture is created. They were employed by the classical world to comprehend the world around them. Myths were frequently created to explain natural events. At its most basic, a myth is a tale that explains how the world got to be the way it is. The majority of Indian myths and tales are taken from two of its epic works, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, as well as ancient Hindu scriptures known as Puranas. The enchanting

stories in these novels fascinate, enthrall, and alarm readers, whether through mysterious creatures or unbreakable curses that affect the course of history. The Mahabharata is an encyclopaedia, with thousands of stories, legends, anecdotes, tales, and fables about gods and monarchs, as well as philosophical, theological, sociological, legal, and ethical lessons. As mentioned, it explores every imaginable element of humanity - the good and the terrible. There may be some pieces of historical reality in it that have yet to be completely uncovered and proven - but repeating history was not the goal of the project - the entire subject matter of the book is DHARMA - this is the core concept of all Hindu scriptures.

The epic of Ramayana, along with the Mahabharata, is considered ancient history in Hinduism (Itihasa). Hindus believe that the events recounted in both epics are historical and occurred at some time in the planet's history. Apart from functioning as key channels for the distribution of popular religious concepts and moral precepts to the public, the two epics had a significant impact on Hindu art, architecture, literature, dance, and theatre.

Various scholars have interpreted Ramayana's symbolic value in various ways. At its most basic, the epic portrays the vulnerabilities to which humans are prone due to their flaws and impurities, as well as the struggle between good and evil forces that may develop as a result of them. It depicts the strong bond between God and his worshippers, as well as the virtue of devotion. It also implies that through virtue and righteousness, as well as the aid of God, mortal beings may outperform even gods in their power to eliminate evil. The epic Ramayana imparts several important truths. It emphasises the frailty of human existence and the idea that even God, when incarnated on Earth, is not immune to sorrow. We may learn from it that even in the face of adversity, humans must maintain their moral imperative. They should follow Rama's example and stay on the road of virtue, resisting bad temptations and yielding to evil powers. They should also learn from Ravana's example that knowledge and power may be detrimental when corrupted by the impurities of ignorance, wants, egoism, and illusion.

In Indian culture, Mahabharata is highly valued. It is believed that the sacred epic was penned by God's Incarnation and teaches us how to live. People in India are expected to understand the basics, if not the entire Mahabharata. People revere Mahabharata's text and the characters in it. People pass along these stories from generation to generation and many times people use the example of Mahabharata to relate it to the experience of daily life.

The epic Mahabharata tells the narrative of a dynastic conflict for the throne of Hastinapur, the Kuru kingdom's capital. The story of the Kauravas and Pandavas, cousin brothers whose hatred for one other led to the biggest battle fought in ancient India, in which the Pandavas were finally victors. However, the Mahabharata is much more than the narrative of the Pandavas and Kauravas. In the lead-up to the main plot, the epic leads us through a series of directly and indirectly linked episodes that present a multi-coloured picture of the actual geopolitical and cultural structure that existed at the time. The epic also contains information on the ideas and norms that regulated the responsibilities and rights of the hierarchically divided communities. It includes the Bhagavat Gita, one of the world's most respected

intellectual and religious texts. It transports us to a time when Indian civilization's basic value system, as well as the ideas of morality and justice, were reinvented. It details complex fighting strategies and weaponry utilised throughout that period, as well as the architecture and literature that flourished in prehistoric India. The epic also portrays the Guru-Shishya parampara, which traces all great Vedic instructors and their disciples. It traces a long pedigree of Kings from several dynasties who reigned over various parts of ancient India for centuries. It provides an excellent overview of ancient India's culture and ideals. It offers us a very excellent image of the political, economic, and religious structure that existed in ancient India, as well as an account of the power struggle that occurred in prehistoric India before the rest of the world was wise enough to build a harmonious communal system. In a word, the Mahabharata is a comprehensive educational package that helps readers journey deep into and learn pre-historic Indian society; nevertheless, all of these details are centred on the Kuru clan's saga. The story inside a story framework, also known as frame stories, is used in numerous Indian sacred and non-religious texts, including the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata is sometimes described as a massive tree, with branches sprouting from various irregular spots and deep roots spreading in all directions. True to this similarity, the Mahabharata has thousands of stories inside its framework. Though the epic's whole sequence is built around the core narrative of the Pandavas and Kauravas, it pauses and diverges throughout its recital to recount a variety of related stories.

Consider the story of Ashwasthama and Draupadi from the Mahabharata. After the great war has ended in tragedy, Ashwasthama discovers that the Pandavas brothers murdered his father Dronacharya by trickery while he was preoccupied with the rest of his army. Drona was proving unconquerable in combat on the 15th day of the war, as he was utilising Brahmadaanda against the Pandavas. Brahmadaanda was a powerful celestial weapon containing the energy of Hinduism's seven greatest sages (Saptarshis). Knowing they couldn't

beat Drona as long as he was armed, Krishna developed a strategy to vanquish the guru. Krishna knew how much Drona loved his son Ashwasthama and was convinced that if he learned that his son had perished, he would lose his resolve to battle. As a result, he advised Bheem that he kill an elephant named Ashwasthama and then inform Drona that he had slain his son. Bheem slaughters the elephant as planned and declares that he killed Ashwasthama on the battlefield. Despite his initial surprise, Drona refuses to trust Bheem's accusations and turns to Yudhisthir for answers, knowing that he would never lie due to his adherence to Dharma. Yudhisthir says, "Ashwasthama has died, but the elephant". Before Drona could hear the second half of the sentence, Krishna blew the conch. Drona, upon hearing from Yudhisthir that his son had died, laid down his weapons, assumed a meditative pose and left his mortal body, transcending to heaven. Enraged, Ashwasthama swears to slay the Pandavas through treachery, exactly as they did to his father. He approaches the Pandavas' camp at night and slaughters everyone there with the assistance of the Asuras who assist him. Assuming the five Pandavas were asleep in their beds, Ashwasthama plunged his sword into their necks, but it turned out that he killed Draupadi's five sons. The Pandavas quickly catch Ashwasthama and submit her to Draupadi to pick his punishment after seeing the devastation committed at their camps. Draupadi, on the contrary, chose to forgive him. He was the son of her husband's adored Guru Dronacharya and so a symbol of him. How could she ask her husband to murder his guru's beloved son?

The word guru in Hindu culture refers to more than simply a teacher. A guru is held in high respect, second only to God. Those who disrespect him are considered uncouth. Hindus believe that life is incomplete without a guru. It is nearly difficult to gain salvation without his guidance. He is the dispeller of the darkness of ignorance and delivers light in the form of enlightenment. A Guru, in the ancient Indian tradition, was the preserver of culture and wisdom. India was for a long time a society of oral tradition. Until a writing system was

developed, it was up to the Gurus to pass on all of the inherited knowledge to the following generation and even then, Guru was still considered crucial to gain the knowledge written in the scriptures. A guru brings personal insight, innovative thought, and experience; the Guru breathes life into mere instruction. Only via the Guru can the teaching or information come to life, and simple bookish knowledge is not as valuable as a teacher's guidance. In particular, in all schools of spirituality, the role of one's Guru is seen as essential to accomplishing the ultimate aim of reaching the ultimate existence. He serves as a role model for his students, embodying wisdom and understanding. As a result, our scriptures highlight that we should seek knowledge from a teacher rather than just reading a book. The Upanishad thus states:

“Only knowledge received directly from the Guru does one learn that Truth that causes the highest good.

The knowledge that one learns from a teacher helps one best to reach his goal.

We (devatas) can give you the knowledge, but only your teacher can show you the way.”

Like a parent, they devoted their lives to guiding and teaching their students. They dedicated their entire lives to their dharma, being detached from materialistic desires. As a result, a Guru was an important part of ancient Indian culture.

“Gurubrahma Gururvishnu, Gurudeva Maheshwara Guru Saakshaat Prambrahma, Tasmay Shree Guruve Namah” One of the most well-known shlokas in the Indian subcontinent is shown here. Guru is the Creator (Brahma), Guru is the Preserver (Vishnu) and Guru is the Destroyer (Maheshwara). Guru is the ultimate (single) Lord himself, I pay my salutations to that Lord Guru.

The guru–shishya relationship emerged as a fundamental component of Hinduism in the early oral traditions of the Upanishads. In ancient Indian culture, a succession of masters and pupils was referred to as parampara (something that has been passed down from generation to generation). Therefore, the Guru (teacher) Shishya (disciple) parampara arises when knowledge (in any discipline) is passed down through successive generations. It is the traditional, residential method of education in which the Shishya stays and studies alongside his Guru as if he were a family member. After the Guru accepts the Shishya and assumes responsibility for his spiritual well-being and advancement in life (Diksha), he imparts all of his wisdom to his student over several years (Shiksha). Guru Dakshina is an important aspect of this connection in the Indian culture. It is customary to compensate one's 'guru' or 'teacher' once the educational process is over. The pupil does this out of respect and acknowledgement for the instructor or guru. It is a customary practice of expressing appreciation to the guru. It can be something as simple and harmless as a fruit, or as

grave as a thumb. The legend of Dronacharya, Guru of Arjun and Eklavya, a bheel tribal lad, for his exemplary representation of discipleship is the most famously known tale that conveys the value of this tradition.

Eklavya was a shudra prince from the Nishad clan. He was keen to study archery from Guru Dronacharya, the royal family's instructor. He assumed that because Guru Dronacharya was a learned and wise man, he would not object if he came from a lesser caste. He went to Guru Dronacharya's ashram and requested that he be taught by him. However, it was against the norms for a royal family instructor to share his expertise with anybody other than the royal family. The goal of such a restriction was to ensure that no one could be a prince's or king's equivalent in the same martial art. It was done just to safeguard the welfare of his citizens since the monarch is their rescuer. Eklavya, on the other hand, was the impoverished hunter's son of an enemy kingdom. As a result, Guru Dronacharya refused to take him as a pupil. "Drona, however, cognisant of all rules of morality, did not accept the prince as his pupil in archery for he was a Nishada and not a Kshatriya." (MBH 01: Section CXXXIV)

Eklavya, on the other hand, was determined to learn from him, so he created an idol of his Guru out of the mud and placed it in a quiet clearing. He worshipped that idol every day and trained in archery in front of him, and over time, he became an archer who could rival even Arjun, Dronacharya's high-born disciple.

One day the Pandavas came upon a dog that couldn't bark because of an extraordinary structure of arrows in and around his mouth. This structure was harmless for the dog but kept it from barking. After stumbling upon Eklavya, who presented himself as Dronacharya's pupil, Arjun returned to his Guru and inquired about this unknown pupil. Curious as to who such a skilled archer might be, Drona went to see him. Seeing the Guru in front of him, the Eklavya was more than overjoyed. He greeted him and duly presented himself as his pupil. Seeing the Guru in front of him, the Eklavya was more than overjoyed. He greeted him and duly presented himself as his pupil. Dronacharya, delighted but apprehensive, reminded Eklavya that to be recognised as his true Shishya, he needed to pay Guru Dakshina. Eklavya is overjoyed that Dronacharya has accepted him as a student, and offered to give him anything he wants. The acharya instructs the Nishad kid to sever his right thumb and submit it to him as Guru Dakshina. Hearing these cruel words, Ekalavya, ever devoted to truth and eager of following his pledge, chopped off his thumb without hesitation and delivered it to Drona. After this, when the prince once again tried to aim with his remaining fingers, he had lost his formal accuracy.

In India, it is traditional to pay the Guru whatever he requests as his fee - Guru-Dakshina for the wisdom the Guru has imparted to the pupil. Eklavya however had not followed the traditional custom of Diksha before accepting Dronacharya as his teacher. Dronacharya, therefore, took back whatever Eklavya had learnt under his 'tutelage' after his instruction was over. Dronacharya stated that he would have punished Eklavya regardless of whether he was a Brahmin or a Kshatriya.

Another theme in this folktale is the significance of a pledge in Indian society. Dronacharya had previously promised Arjun that he would make him the finest archer in the world at the time. As a

result, although being profoundly pleased with Eklavya, he kept his pledge to Arjun, ensuring that he was never outshined.

Vows are promises that play an essential part in both Indian epic and modern culture. Giving your word to somebody meant you had to keep it no matter what the consequences were in the future. . Keeping one's vows demonstrates commitment and the capacity to withstand temptation. It is easy for human nature to succumb to temptation, thus rejecting it at the expense of one's enjoyment is regarded as a virtue and an indication of one's devotion to fulfilling their promise for the greater good. Examine the narrative of Bhishma Pitama, an exemplary man who never violated his word even if it meant paving the path for total devastation, which he became a victim of- The legend of Bhishma Pratigya.

Devavrata has been known as Bhishma because he swore the awful pledge of everlasting celibacy. His pratigya (vow) also contained the commitment to serve whoever ascended his father's reign selflessly and loyally (the throne of Hastinapura). Shantanu, his father, fell in love with a fisherwoman named Satyawati and wished to marry her. Satyawati admired him as well. Her father, however, refused to give his daughter's hand in marriage, claiming that her sons would never become rulers of the kingdom. Shantanu became quite unhappy and dejected as a result of this. When Devavrata discovered the source of his father's grief, he went to Satyawati's father and assured him that he would never demand

Hastinapura's crown. He also told him that Satyawati and Shantanu's kid would govern the country once his father died. Satyawati's father reasoned that even if Devavrata never ascended to the throne, his children may still claim it eventually. Devavrata then accepted the vow of celibacy, surrendering his position as the crown prince while also foregoing the joy of marriage and family life. This awful pratigya quickly earned him the approval of the Gods. They bestowed the blessing of Icchamrityu (the ability to decide his own time of death) on him because they were impressed by his strength and selflessness. This meant that no one could ever murder Bhishma until he wished it.

It was Bheeshma's two vows that created the groundwork for the Mahabharata epic. Bhishma's life addresses the dilemma of choosing one's dharma or the right thing.

Years later, Bhishma was on the quest for a wife for his half-brother, King Vichitravirya. He kidnapped Kashi princesses Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika from their swayamvara (a ceremony where princesses are allowed to choose their spouse from the assemblage of potential suitors present there). Amba, the eldest princess, had already fallen in love with Salwa, the monarch of Saubala. The youthful monarch attempted everything he could to halt the kidnapping, but he was no match for the mighty Bhishma.

When Amba arrived in Hastinapura, she told Bhishma that she and Salwa were deeply in love and that they planned to marry shortly. Taking pity on her, he returned her to Salwa, who, still hurt by Bhishma's humiliation, refused to let Amba back into his life. Amba then sought Bhishma, pleading with him to marry her. He declined, citing his pledge of everlasting celibacy as the cause. Enraged by being shamed in this way, Amba determined to avenge the affront, even if it meant being

reincarnated over and over again. Amba left Hastinapura and sought refuge with Parashurama, who ordered Bhishma to marry Amba. The latter refused to accept the command, stating that he would sooner die than break his pratigya (oath).

Parashurama was enraged when he heard his disciple's disobedient words. Parashurama summoned him to Kurukshetra for a battle. At the combat, Bhishma discovered he was riding a chariot while Parashurama was walking. He asked the latter to bring a chariot and armour as well so that neither would have an unfair advantage. Parashurama then bestowed divine eyesight to him and urged him to look again. At this moment, Bhishma could view the entire Earth as his Guru's chariot. The four Vedas were transformed into the Lord's horses, with the Upanishads serving as the reins. His charioteer was Lord Vayu (the Wind God), and his armour was the Vedic Goddesses Gayatri, Savitri, and Saraswati.

Bhishma, humbled, dismounted from his chariot and fell at Parashurama's feet. He also asked for his blessings for the fortitude to defend his dharma, as well as permission to fight his own beloved Guru. Parashurama, pleased with his student's commitment to him, blessed him and urged him to keep his pledge. The Lord, on the other hand, had promised Amba that he would battle Bhishma, thus they fought for 23 days. The war dragged on indefinitely since neither side was powerful enough to vanquish the other. Bhishma attempted to utilise the Praswapastra against his Guru on the 23rd day of the fight. Parashurama was unaware of the usage of this weapon, which could induce deep slumber. This may have worked in Bhishma's favour. However, before he could use it, an Akashvani (voice from the sky) informed him that doing so would be a terrible, unforgivable dishonour to his Guru. His Pitrus (ancestors) then came before him and barred him from entering Parashurama's chariot, stopping him from wielding the weapon against the latter. Ultimately, Narada, the divine sage, came in front of Parashurama and asked him to halt the conflict. The latter agreed, and the Gods agreed to call the fight a draw. Following the battle, Parashurama recounted the events to Amba, urging her to let go of her rage and seek Bhishma's blessings. She, on the other hand, refused to listen to his advice and insisted on achieving her goal of vengeance. She subsequently performed great penance to satisfy Lord Shiva. The Lord stood before her,

pleased, and told her that in her next incarnation, she would be born as a man named Shikhandi. Shiva also told her that she would remember her history and would eventually be responsible for Bhishma's death, thereby completing her pledge.

Several days into the great battle of Mahabharata, the situation appeared to be stuck in a stalemate, with neither faction getting the upper hand. As the Pandavas began to ponder what to do, Krishna urged them to go to Bhishma and ask him to offer a way out of this impasse. The latter adored the Pandavas and was fully aware that he was the greatest impediment to their success. Recognizing that he would have to remove himself for the dharma to take its course, he provided them with a suggestion as to how they could beat him. He stated that if a woman approached him, he would put down his weapons and cease fighting since he did not believe fighting or attacking a woman to be gentlemanly. As a result, on the tenth day of the Kurukshetra War, Shikhandi joined Arjuna on his chariot and challenged Bhishma. True to his pledge, the latter laid down his weapons and was killed by Arjuna's many arrows.

Bhishma had pledged his loyalty to Hastinapura's throne, thus it was his responsibility to fully support whoever resided on it. However, he realised that the Kauravas were not on the side of justice and that his invulnerable self was obstructing the fight for Dharma. Bhishma thus put down his life for the benefit of the greater good of the universe. He stayed alive with his Icchamrityu boon until he could pass on his wisdom to the next monarch, Yudhishtira, and then he exited his mortal form. He received moksha as a result of his penitent life and unwavering devotion to his Dharma. Bhishma is often regarded as a model of devotion and sacrifice. His name is an ode to him, Bhishma, which means great, and Pitamah, which means Grandfather, which when combined equals Great Grandfather. Bhishma's character teaches us the virtue of firm resolution (dhirra pratigya), which is to do

whatever one has resolved to do at whatever cost. To have a strong will, there must be certitude (dhirra nishchayata). Under whatever circumstances, he did not deviate from the task he had committed to. He teaches discipline, such as not being sidetracked from one's aims and commitments and falling into the web of Maya (illusion via worldly pleasures, with God being the ultimate reality). Even in current times, living a life of such integrity is highly regarded in Indian culture.

Let us now turn our attention to the Ramayana, especially the story of King Dashratha and his third wife Kaikeyi. As a reward for saving his life in a fight, King Dashratha, Lord Rama's father, promised his young wife that he would grant any two of her desires. Kaikeyi, however, dismisses it, so the king promises that she can utilise the boons whenever she wishes, and he would deliver on his pledge. Years passed, and all three Queens gave birth to boys. Bharat, Kaikeyi's son; Laxman, Sumitra's son; and Ram, Kaushalya's son, who was also Dashratha's favourite son. When Ram turned 16 and was ready to be proclaimed King, Manthara, Kaikeyi's handmaiden, chastises her regarding the outcome of Rama's coronation. She taunts her by claiming that Rama would proclaim Kaushalya as Rajmata (Queen mother) and that Kaikeyi along with her son will lose their status. She also advises her that Bharat be crowned king and Rama be exiled for 14 years. Finally, Kaikeyi's strong desire to maintain her superior standing over Kaushalya drove her to claim both boons bestowed to her by Raja Dashratha. For her first boon, she demands that Bharat, her son, be the crown prince. For her second boon, joining both hands, she pleaded for Ram to be sent to exile for 14 years to a forest (Vanvaas) while being neutral towards the kingdom and living as a hermit. King Dashratha, saddened and heartbroken concurred, for he had given his word to Kaikeyi. It was during this exile, that Ravana abducted Sita, kicking off the main conflict of the Ramayana. Both epics' theme is curiously based on pledges, vows, and oaths. While Bhishma's pledge is self-imposed, King Dashratha becomes an enforced appeal, an agonising command, and

finally a weight to be carried by his death and the tribulations of his son Ram, who is banished for fourteen years. However, in both situations, the resolves are the trigger points; they radically alter the narrative. Carrying out the resolution is a moral obligation, not just appeasement of it. It is therefore critical to pick one's words carefully and to be mindful of what the future may bring, for words that leave the mouth do not return.

While vows and boons are on one end of the spectrum of the value of speech, Shraap (curse) is on the other. Curses, like vows, cannot be reversed once given. They can, however, be altered to create an escape path for the bearer if and when the individual pleads for mercy or forgiveness. The narrative of the celestial sage Narada and Lord Vishnu is a reminder of how even Gods and saints are obligated to uphold the laws of the universe and respect its rules. It's also worth noting that both mankind and gods bestow boons and curses on each other.

Many Puranas have stories in which the deity Vishnu reveals the notion of Maya (illusion of life) to the wandering sage Narada. Vishnu leads Narada through diverse life situations in each of those stories to let him grasp the ultimate grip of Maya that overwhelms the human intellect. In this narrative, Vishnu teaches another lesson to Maya. Lord Vishnu once observed Sage Narad becoming haughty and boastful after obtaining a blessing from Lord Shiva. Lord Vishnu then continues to teach Lord Narad another fascinating lesson about Maya, which results in a curse. The entire Ramayan is spun and woven on the one curse cast by Sage Narad, with its threads of politics and promises, dedication and disappointments, acceptance and rejection.

Lord Shiva once endowed Narada with the ability to meditate in Tapovan, a forest for Tapasya (meditation), where no one could disturb him. He began his meditation, which concerned Lord Indra since he was apprehensive about his meditation's goal. To annoy him,

he dispatched Agni (god of fire), Varuna (god of rain), and Vayu (god of wind). As a result, they began their mission. Varuna made it rain, Vayu made the wind blow, and Agni afterwards set fire to the region. But it was pointless, and they all went back to heaven. Indra then went up to Kamadev, the deity of Love, to bother him. He experimented with everything from gorgeous dancing females to buzzing bees to birds humming. Proud Narada saw Lord Shiva on Kailash after finishing the meditation and boasted about defeating Agni, Vayu, Varuna, and Kamadev. Shiva just had one thing to say to him: don't say anything. But Narada couldn't help himself and brag about everything in front of Vishnu. Concerned that Narad would not be able to stop him, he dispatched two men of his tribe to trail him in secret. As anticipated, Narada couldn't help himself and boast about everything before Vishnu.

To humble the sage, Lord Vishnu established a splendid empire with a beautiful princess. The princess's father planned a grand swayambar (an event where the princess chooses her husband from various candidates) for her and asked sage Narad to read her palm to read her fortune and bless her future. The moment Narad saw the princess, instantly fell in love with her, leaving all his concerns about overcoming Maya behind and wishing to marry her. After reading her fortune, he discovered that whoever marries the princess will become King of the Three Worlds. He asked Vishnu for assistance, requesting that he be transformed into Vishnu's avatar 'Hari,' the most gorgeous prince in the event so that the princess would choose him as her husband.

The day of 'Swayamvar' has finally arrived. Narad entered the ceremony confidently clothed in a regal avatar. He knew he was the most attractive, and that the princess would choose him. However, upon seeing his face, the princess burst out laughing and went by him before presenting the garland to the last king, Lord Vishnu. This irritated Narad, who informed the princess that he deserved the

garland. Everyone during the ceremony made fun

of him and had him look in the mirror. When he looked in the mirror, he saw that he was not a handsome man, but rather a monkey. Unfortunately, Narad was ignorant that Vishnu's second name, 'Hari,' also referred to a monkey. Narad was enraged and confronted Vishnu about his actions. "I requested you to create me the most attractive prince, but you transformed me into a monkey," he said. And now I've lost the love of my life because of you." In blind fury, he curses Vishnu, saying that he, too, would lose his beloved and suffer the agony of separation. And at that time, only monkeys could help him reclaim his love. Turning to the two Shiva tribesmen who had also laughed at him, he cursed them to be born as Rakshasas (demons) in the next life.

Narad became agitated as he realised what he had just done. He begged forgiveness from the Lord. Vishnu, on the other hand, smiled and accepted the curse, knowing that it was his responsibility to obey the rules of creation. He stated that he would assume human form, marry Goddess Lakshmi, and they would endure separation. Narad then altered his curses. "Although you two will be born as Rakshasas in your next incarnations," he remarked to the two tribesmen he had previously cursed, "after the Lord has taken his avatar on earth, he shall grant you two moksha." The two tribesmen were later reincarnated as Ravana and Kumbhakaran, who were slain by Lord Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu.

This legend teaches its readers a lot. First and foremost, there is the notion of Maya. Maya was the power with which the gods created and sustained the physical cosmos in early Vedic mythology. Maya came to refer to the illusion of the earthly sphere as it connected to Brahman, the highest cosmic power, with the emergence of the more intellectual Upanishads and, eventually, the school of Advaita Vedanta. When regarded in the monistic perspective of Brahman, each physical thing, as well as each autonomous ego-consciousness, is declared unreal. Maya must be conquered in various traditions of Hinduism to free the soul from

rebirth and karma. Buddhism and Sikhism both hold similar views on Maya. Maya is the restricted, solely physical and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has been enmeshed in Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Maya is said to be an illusion, a veil over the genuine, unified Self, also known as Brahman. The Hindu literature known as the Upanishads elaborated on the notion of Maya. Many philosophies and faiths aim to "pierce the curtain" to reveal the transcendent truth that gives rise to the illusion of physical reality. Second, there is the vice of arrogance. After defeating Maya, Narad became arrogant, which caused him to lose his spiritual gains earned through his Tapasya. Finally, the legend reinforces the belief that one should think before speaking, particularly when overcome by emotions such as rage or even joy. Narad, blinded by fury, cursed his dear companion, so setting in motion the events of the Ramayana.

Curses and boons are intimately associated with the notion of rebirth in Indian epics. As previously stated, Narad cursed Vishnu, which resulted in the Ramayana and Amba being reincarnated as Shikhandi after receiving the boon of murdering Bhishma. Similarly, Bhishma Pitamah was born in the mortal realm owing to a sage's curse.

Bhishma was one of the eight Vasus (Ashtavasus), or elemental gods, who were doomed to be born as humans on Earth. According to the Mahabharata, the Vasus and their wives were relaxing in the forest when Dyu, one of the wives, noticed an exceptional cow and encouraged her husband Prabhasa to take it, which Prabhasa did with the approval and cooperation of Prithu and his other brothers. The cow, unfortunately for the Vasus, was owned by the sage Vashishta, who learned via his ascetic talents that the Vasus had stolen it and cursed them to be born as humans on Earth. Vashishta responded to the Vasus' pleadings by promising that seven of them would be free of worldly existence within a year of their birth, with only Prabhasa having to pay the entire sentence.

The Vasus then requested that Ganga, the river goddess, become their mother. Ganga incarnated and agreed to marry King Shantanu on the condition that he never questions her actions in any manner. As seven children were born one after the other, Ganga murdered them in her waters, relieving them from their punishment, and the monarch did not object. Only after the eighth child was born did the king finally oppose his wife, who reminded him of his oath and left, leaving Devavrat (Prabhas) in his care. So the eighth son, Prabhasa incarnated, stayed alive and imprisoned in mortal form, later becoming known as Bhishma in his mortal incarnation.

All Indian beliefs share a philosophy of karma, the law of cause and effect, which asserts that what one does in this life will affect the next. The process of birth and rebirth—i.e., soul transmigration—is eternal in Hinduism until one achieves moksha or freedom from the process. Moksha is attained when one is liberated from the Maya that surrounds him and recognises that the everlasting core of the person (atman) and the Absolute reality (brahman) are the same. As a result, one can avoid the cycle of death and rebirth (samsara). It is a fundamental concept in Indian culture that life does not cease with the death of the physical body. The body perishes, but the soul lives on. It lives on in the astral body, which is the physical body's counterpart. The astral body is comprised of astral matter and lives in a realm similar to this one known as Devaloka, or the Second World. In other words, the soul lives on in another body after death, the astral body, to complete itself, to spiritually grow and progress. It is reincarnated into a corporeal body at the appropriate moment, according to its karma. As a result, the astral body, containing the soul, enters a new physical body. It is reincarnated into a corporeal body at the appropriate moment, according to its karma. As a result, the astral body, containing the soul, enters a new physical body. This cycle is repeated several times until the soul spiritually opens and achieves a level of perfection or mature progression. Samsara refers to the repeating cycles of births and deaths.

The soul moves from one physical body to the next. The Hindus believe that each time this occurs, the soul has reborn. This is the process that is referred to as "reincarnation."

Each time the soul takes on a new body, it gets closer to perfection. To have a better birth each time, one must follow their Dharma and live out their karma in this life positively and fully, while avoiding producing unpleasant new karmas. After a series of such good incarnations, and after attaining God-realization, the soul body matures to the point that it no longer requires physical incarnation. It instead continues to evolve on inner layers of consciousness. Moksha is the liberation from samsara. The soul is thought to have been liberated from the bonds of birth and death. Reincarnation is inextricably linked to Karma in Indian religion, which is the rule of action and

reaction that governs existence. The soul carries the mental impressions it acquired during its worldly life with it. These attributes are referred to as the soul's karma. Karma means "deed or act," and it refers to the notion of cause and consequence in a broader sense. Karma is not fate, for God gave his offspring the ability to choose their actions. Karma, in esoteric terms, refers to the total of our acts and their associated reactions in this and all prior incarnations, all of which impact our destiny. The soul reaps the consequences of its activities. If we cause others to suffer, we will eventually suffer ourselves. We shall be liked and given to if we love and give. Through thought, sensation, and action, each soul creates its destiny. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just like gravity is a physical law.

Karma is movement in the psyche. There is no karma while the mind is stationary. Every action has a corresponding reaction. Before doing an action, they want to know what the reaction will be. They understand that not all emotions are immediate; that they are cumulative and, in some situations, unexpectedly rebound. The wise regard penance, or 'Tapasya,' as self-inflicted karma or prepayment of a reaction predicted as a result of past conduct. A well-executed penance mediates between the action and the reaction, balancing both and smoothing out the karma.

Tapasya (penance) is another component of the Indian lifestyle that is still valued today (penance). Tapasya is loosely translated as 'penance,' but like Dharma, it has multiple implications that are difficult to properly grasp in a single word. Tapasya is not a punishment for wrongdoing, but rather a deep meditation to get one closer to Moksha. It can also be done to appease the gods to get a blessing as a reward. One abandons worldly pleasures and frees their mind from the illusion of Maya. It is widely held that Karma acquired through hundreds of lives can only be reversed by Tapasya, and similarly the rewards of Tapasya gained over the years can be reversed if one creates 'bad karma' by acting unethically or failing to follow his dharma.

It is worth mentioning that throughout the Indian epics, it is often stated that the Gods reward everyone equally, whether they be Rakshasas (demons), humans, or deities. Ravana is the antagonist of the Ramayana, a tyrant who tormented the Gods and kidnapped Sita. This was his act of revenge against Rama and Lakshman for cutting off his sister, Surpanakha's nose. Ravana, however, once spent several years doing great penance (or Tapasya) to Lord Shiva. Lord Ravana appeased him by chopping off his head ten times during his penance. Every time he slashed his head off, a new head appeared, allowing him to continue his penance.

After his tenth decapitation, Lord Shiva arrived and handed him a blessing, impressed with his asceticism. Lord Ravana requested immortality, which Lord Shiva refused to grant, but instead provided him with the celestial nectar of immortality. For as long as the nectar of immortality was stored under his navel, he could not be defeated. Lord Ravana also requested ultimate protection against and dominion over gods, celestial spirits, other Rakshas (demons),

serpents, and wild creatures. He did not seek protection from mortal men since he was contemptuous of them. Lord Shiva bestowed these boons on him in addition to his ten severed heads and enormous power through divine weaponry and magic understanding.

Dharma, along with Karma and reincarnation, is the most fundamental principle in Indian culture. It is a key Hindu, Buddhist, and yogic idea that refers to a universal law or principle. To live out their dharma, an individual must act per this law. Dharma, together with sangha and buddha, is regarded as one of Buddhism's three jewels, paving the way to enlightenment. It is one of the four basic philosophical ideas of Hinduism, along with Artha, Kama, and Moksha. It is also a rule of justice and Satya (truth), bringing order to the customs, behaviours, and ethics that make existence possible. Dharma implies that there is a correct or true method for each individual to live their lives to benefit both themselves and others. Dharma is inextricably linked to the principles of responsibility and selfless service, or seva, and is thus a key principle of yoga. Although it might be difficult to comprehend because there is no single-word English equivalent, "correct method of life" is a close approximation. Dharma can refer to a personal goal or purpose on an individual level. Individuals' dharma is said to be predetermined by tradition. A soul is born into a certain caste or social group as a reward or punishment for activities in previous lifetimes, depending on karma. Their life path is determined by universal principles, and the only way to develop is to stay on this route and strive toward their predetermined goal. According to the Bhagavad Gita, it is preferable to perform one's dharma poorly than to perform another's brilliance.

It is claimed that for order and peace to exist in the world, all beings must embrace their dharma. When a person practises their dharma, they are pursuing their genuine calling and benefiting all other beings in the cosmos by performing their rightful role.

According to Hindus, all beings have their dharma: the sun must shine and bees must produce honey. Dharma also refers to acting in line with the Buddha's teachings and the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism. It is thought that living on this "correct path" leads to self-realization and enlightenment. Above all, living per your dharma offers a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. The Ramayana is an epic that goes to great length about the complicated relationships between truth and dharma. The epic centres around Ram, the embodiment of dharma, who experiences difficulties in acting according to dharma due to his different roles and circumstances in life.

Rama was the ideal son when he was a child. Later, he was a competent ruler of Ayodhya and a perfect husband to his devoted wife, Sita. For 2,000 years, young Indians have been instructed to "be like Rama" or "be like Sita."

Prince Rama, the eldest of four sons, was to succeed his father as king when he retired. King Dashratha, compelled to demand Rama's exile, exiles him for fourteen years. Rama accepted the decree without inquiry. "I joyfully carry out my father's instructions." When Rama's wife, Sita, learned that Rama was to be exiled, she pleaded to accompany him. "As shadow to substance, so wife to husband," Rama was reminded. "Isn't it the wife's dharma to stand with her husband? Allow me to walk ahead of you to soften the path for your feet" She begged. Rama consented, and Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana proceeded to the forest. When Bharata discovered what his mother had done, he went to see Rama in the forest. He reminded Rama, "The eldest must reign." "Please return to your rightful post as the king." Rama refused to defy his father, so Bharata removed his brother's sandal and declared, "These sandals will be placed on the throne as emblems of your power. I will only reign as regent in your stead, and I will make daily gifts to my Lord. When the fourteen years

of exile are through, I will gladly return the kingdom to you." Bharata's selflessness struck Rama much.

"I should have known that you would willingly surrender what other men struggle lifetimes to learn to give up," Rama remarked to Bharata as he departed. While in exile, he annihilates demons, which is a Kshatriya's (warrior's) dharma and kills Bali, the invincible, to retain his dharma as a friend. Later in the myth, Ravana, the wicked King of Lanka (what is most likely modern-day Sri Lanka), kidnaps Sita. Rama gathered a money army, constructed a causeway over to Lanka, freed Sita, and returned her safely to Ayodhya.

Ramayana tries to offer an example of an ideal way of life via its characters, and how one individual is obligated to fulfil different dharma as a son, a wife, a mother, a husband, and so on. Mahabharata's notion of Dharma is an enduring subject. Dharma is everyone's way of life and the distinction between good and wrong. The Mahabharata closely follows this, since Dharma is one of the key causes of the great conflict in the Mahabharata, with each side fighting for what they felt was good by following their Dharma.

The word Dharma appears frequently throughout the Mahabharata, usually in the sense of obligation. The caste system of India was still in effect at the time the epic took place. The Pandavas and Kauravas were all warriors or Kshatriyas. Their responsibilities included governing the land and fighting when necessary. However, regardless of caste, everyone should follow their Dharma. Whether it's younger children focused on their academics and school, or adults working and providing for their families, doing what's right is always crucial.

In the framework of the Mahabharata, we might consider Yudhisthira. Draupadi spoke to him about Dharma after he had suffered both psychologically and physically in exile. She claimed that Dharma did not protect him, to which Yudisthira answered, "I do not act for Dharma's rewards, I act because I must....by its nature, my mind is obliged to Dharma." This just demonstrates that he acts not on what would be right, but on what he should do, which is the correct thing. It is also stated that Dharma fathered Yudistira, which explains his attitude and acts throughout the epic. Yudhishtira was the eldest Pandava, thus he was crowned king right away. As a result, his responsibility was to serve the people over whom he presided. However, before the conflict, he expressed a desire to resign from his employment and live in the forest. However, he did not do so, primarily because it was not his job, and responsibility was your Dharma. Yudhishtira has mentioned Dharma many times. Arjuna is a popular figure in the Mahabharata who endured a huge moral test throughout the conflict.

Arjuna was hesitant to battle against his own family, demonstrating his tremendous love for them despite everything they had put him and his siblings through. Arjuna sees his family in both armies, because Duryodhana, his opponent, is also his cousin, and so both sides are strewn with "fathers, grandfathers, instructors, siblings, uncles, grandkids, in-laws, and friends." Arjuna is struck with sadness and tells Krishna that he does not want to fight if it means murdering his relatives. He doesn't need a kingdom if it means hurting his family. He throws down his bow and arrows and sits in the centre of the battlefield on his chariot. Krishna instructs Arjuna to rise with a courageous heart

and advance to defeat the enemies. When Arjuna asks how he can justify such sin, Krishna responds that there is no such thing as the killer and the killed, that the body is only flesh – and that when he dies, he attains another body. These limitations of the physical body should not prevent someone from achieving what he must do, which is to fight evil and restore the power of good. According to Krishna, the genuine master recognises that reality rests in the eternal; such individuals are unaffected by the fleeting changes that come with the senses. As a warrior, he must instead follow his dharma, or duty, where nothing is more important than the struggle against evil. However, if Arjuna avoids this combat, he would sin, breaching both his dharma and his dignity. This prompted a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, which resulted in the Bhagavad Gita,

important literature in Indian civilisation that teaches about responsibility, action, and renunciation. There are three parts to it: knowledge, action, and love. It gives you a particular way of life and allows you to live a joyous, stress-free existence. The concept of dharma appears several times throughout the Mahabharata. It has been proved by various well-known characters in the book, as well as taught by numerous sages. It is the moral of many stories and something from which to learn. It is the subject of several conservation efforts and is well known to everyone. Dharma is something that pertains to all human beings and should be followed. No action should be performed just to perform Dharma, but all actions should be Dharma.

Every youngster has heard their parents and grandparents narrate the stories of the Ramayana's characters. Everyone is familiar with Rama and Lakshmana's legendary bravery. The Ramayana is a novel that recounts a conflict between outsiders and other creatures. The epic's portrayal of virtue triumphing over evil is unmistakable. The Mahabharata describes a horrific civil war in which no one wins. The Ramayana does not question Dharma, however, the Mahabharata does. Since their writing, these two epic novels – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata – have been sources of inspiration and cultural teachings for most Indians.

Myths were a way for people to understand the workings of the world around them, things that they could not explain with the scientific understanding they had. They do, however, continue to play an important role in modern life. Myths, for example, describe our subconscious personal and cultural processes. They connect our inner and exterior worlds through personification, moving us from the conceptual to the practical and are metaphorically significant. Myths reside in the psyche, and this psyche influences our perspective of the world. Myths were employed by the classical world to help people make sense of their lives and the world around them. Myths are the underlying influences that shape us in current times. Each myth organises a way of thinking and serves as a metaphor for our actions. It is consequently critical to comprehend a society's myths to appreciate the values that its people cherish.

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