

Assignment 01

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Myths have played an important role in shaping the structure of ancient agrarian societies. They were a key factor in strengthening social solidarity and cohesion which is also known as Asabiyya. Myths not only helped to maintain social and political stability but also shaped their religious beliefs. These mythical stories were not just normal stories. They taught ethics and social norms and most importantly, people developed strong bonds and a collective identity by sharing these stories. Myths teach moral lessons as well as warn about divine punishment and praise for loyalty and cooperation. By aligning everyone under shared beliefs and customs, myths helped to maintain order in society. Rulers and authorities often used these myths to justify their rule. In many ancient civilizations, it can be seen that rulers presented themselves as someone who was chosen by gods or protectors of the divine will to gain people's loyalty. In ancient agrarian societies, people were concerned with natural disasters such as floods, drought, earthquakes etc. Thus, myths especially about great catastrophes were utilized as social tools in trying to reinforce societal norms and structure. Some of these ancient and earliest agrarian civilizations such as Mesopotamian civilization and ancient Indian civilization had their own version of flood myth. These flood myths reflect a divine influence over human life in their agrarian society and show how myths can be utilized to legitimize spiritual and political authority.

The Mesopotamian flood myth is one of the oldest known myths which had a huge impact on their social and religious life. This myth is a flood story in the Epic of Gilgamesh that tells how and why god decides to wipe out humanity by a massive flood. On the other hand, god Ea chose Uta-napishti to survive the great flood and advised him to build a large boat in order to survive with his family and animals. After the great flood ended, Uta-napishti was granted immortality due to his loyalty and obedience (George et al., 2003). This was an important story to the people in Mesopotamia as it shows the gods have full control over life and death. If people don't respect the god and obey the rulers, god will punish them. This made people show more fear and respect for the gods. The story of Uta-napishti glorified the power of the rulers as well. Rulers portrayed themselves as someone who was chosen by the god to rule. This portrayal made people obedient to their rulers as the rulers had a special connection with the gods. Thus, the rulers gained more authority to rule over the people. This myth also played a huge role in keeping people together. It kept the people aware of the fact that they belonged to a community which shared some common values and duties. People came to understand that they had to follow their religious practices so that the gods wouldn't get upset with them. These beliefs helped them to maintain Asabiyya. The Mesopotamian flood myth, the story of Uta-napishti from "The Epic of Gilgamesh" was more than a normal story. This myth established a belief that the gods must have to be obeyed and rules have to be followed. This myth had created a very strong feeling of unity and social order among the Mesopotamian people and it made sure that the society was working as a whole with belief in one common mind.

Unlike the Mesopotamian flood myth, the Indian flood myth of Manu describes how divine forces shape the fate of humankind and then maintain the continuity of social and moral order. The myth is about the first man Manu who survived a giant flood which submerged the whole world. This is a kind of religious myth joined together with ideas of cosmic law and order. The story of Manu shows how the flood was not just a natural disaster but also a divine event that restored balance to the world. Manu was a king's minister who saved a fish that became big and warned him of a forthcoming flood. The fish was the god Vishnu in disguise. Instructed by the fish, Manu built a large boat which was guided by the fish during the flood (Hossieni , 2018). The story of Manu is not only about how humankind came into existence after a catastrophic event but also about the concept of dharma which refers to the cosmic order that regulates life on earth. Here, Manu stands for the perfect ruler who follows divine commands to maintain moral and social laws. His survival of the flood and his role in the recolonization of the earth indicate that human society is bound to prosper only if it conforms to the patterns of morality. Here the flood comes out as a purging event in which only the virtuous and those who are obedient to the law of the gods survive. It validates the power of those rulers who are regarded as upholders of dharma. Moreover, this story portrays the importance of unity and cooperation when it comes to survival. The salvation of Manu, the sages and every other animal shows the necessity for humankind to be in peaceful coexistence with nature and with themselves. It creates a sense of unity which is important for the survival and well-being of social life.

In conclusion, Indian and Mesopotamian flood myths show how the use of religious stories was deliberately used to support and defend political and spiritual authority and to maintain Asabiyya in ancient agrarian societies. The Epic of Gilgamesh showed the power of the gods and how human beings had to listen to the gods. It reinforced the position of the priest-kings standing between gods and humans. On the other hand, the myth of Manu in ancient India emphasised that the gods were the source of dharma or moral law. This demonstrated the holy obligation of rulers to uphold and enforce this law. These stories legitimized rulers and created social norms that promoted cohesion within the communities by highlighting heavenly favour and retribution. Communities were bound together by common rituals and beliefs which acted as powerful reminders of moral obligations and communal identity. Thus, myth helped in the strengthening of Asabiyya by uniting people with a spiritual belief and a moral obligation in ancient agrarian societies.

References

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2. Hossieni, Hossien. (2018). Great floods from primary scientific hypothesis to myths. *European Journal of Science and Theology*. 14. 41-46.