CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Legends have occupied an important place in the whole world literature. India is no exception and there has been found various types of legendary right from the Vedic period. These legends are very much interesting as well as important from various perspectives. The Vedic legends provide one with various information about social, political, philosophical and religious conditions of the people of ancient India.\(^1\) Particularly these legends have a great influence on the later Indian literary works of subsequent periods.

WHAT IS A LEGEND

The term “Legend” at first comes through French from the Latin expression ‘Legenda’. The meaning of ‘Legenda’ is ‘to be said’. It is derived from the verb ‘Ligere’ which meaning is ‘to read’.\(^2\) But originally

1. Although the Brāhmaṇas fortunately contain much that has only a distant reference to the sacrificial cult, far instance, cosmogonic myths, ancient legends and narratives, yet the sacrifice is the one and only theme from which all the discussions start on which everything hinges.

HIL, Vol. I, p. 188.

2. F. Legende, Lo Legenda; F. Legera.

it meant the story of a saint's life. In some dictionaries, the same meaning is reflected.³ According to the meanings, these stories containing wonders and miracles but have no historical foundation. Still in consideration of their popularities, they are believed to be true. But in some other dictionaries it is found that legends have historical foundation.⁴

Activities of popular human figures namely a sage, a king or some other semi-divine persons are the main theme in legends. The chief character is always required to be a moral and ideal being. A legend is always believed to be true by the teller or the listener. Some popular stories from history which have some real event as the basis and which have the capability of impressing the general imagination, are described in the legend.

³ a) A Legend is a story of saints life, a traditional an untrue, unhistorical or marvelous tale .......
   CTCD, p. 609.

   b) A story of a saint’s life or collection of these books of liturgical lesson, non-historical story
   ODEE, p. 522.

⁴ Legend is a story handed down far generations and popularly believed to have a historical basis, all such stories belonging to a particular group of people, a notable person much talked about in his own time, the stories of his exploits.

   NWD, p. 269.
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEGEND AND MYTH

‘Mythos’ or ‘Muthos’ is a Greek word which has different meanings such as word, speech, tale etc. The term ‘Myth’ comes from this word. Myth signifies a story which is devoid of facts and related to a super human being. In myths, man tries to explain the world and objects which he has seen in it. Then he draws some conclusion there from for himself in the natural phenomena which direct his way of life in the world.

Therefore, it is held that a myth is a non-historical old story. Sometimes, both the words i.e. ‘myth’ and ‘legend’ are considered in the same sense. But there are some differences between the two. These may

5. The term ‘Myth’ is equivalent to Greek word ‘Mythos’. According to the Greek writers the term is used as general name for certain kind of folk-lore, historic tale setting forth the process of nature or belief about religion, custom, tradition etc.


6. In general a myth is a story which is not true and which involves super natural being or at ay rate super human beings.

   DLT, p. 400.

7. A myth then is firstly, man’s attempt to explain the world and the things he sees in it, and to intelligible to himself the natural phenomena.

   GM, p. 4.
be enumerated as follows:

(1) In a legend there exist some historical elements which are based on facts.

But a myth appears to be a particular kind of narrative with a cosmological and invented character.

(2) Life and activities of the characters like a sage, a saint, a king or a semi-divine person are founding a legend.

On the other hand, a myth is associated with the life and activities of a god, a goddess or the power which is not able to be explained by the laws of nature.  

(3) Myth has some sort of religious background. Therefore, it is used for those stories which are related to gods, goddesses and supernatural powers.

But a legend has a historical background. Sometimes a legend is found to be founded upon some facts.

8. A myth is an account of the deeds of a god of supernatural being, usually expressed in terms of primitive thought. It is an attempt to explain the relations of man to the universe. EME, p. 11.

9. Myth is sometimes distinguished from legend as being entirely fictitious and imaginary, whereas the legend is woven around an historical figure. Ibid, IX, p. 29.
(2) Purānic: The Purānas are treated as one of the important sources of the Indian legends. It is found that some of the legends that have made their first appearance in the Vedas have re-appeared in the purānic works undergoing marked transformations.\(^{12}\)

The Purānic legends provide us sufficient knowledge of ancient India. There are many such important legends. As for example, legends of Māndhātā\(^{13}\), Bhagīratha\(^{14}\), Devāhuti\(^{15}\), Kapila\(^{16}\), Jamadagni and Visvāmitra\(^{17}\) and Samudramanthana etc.\(^{18}\)

LEGENDS FROM THE OTHER SOURCES

In addition to the Vedas and Purānas there are other sources also of Indian legends. These are the epics, the KSS, Buddhist Jātaks, and Jaina

12. The Purānas undoubtedly reached back to great antiquity and are rooted in the Vedic literature; many a legend already familiar from Rgveda hymns reappears in the Purānas.


15. BP, 3, 22-25, pp. 304-324.
18. Ibid, 8, 6-9, pp. 896-916.
literature. Some legends that have appeared in the two great Epics i.e. the VR\textsuperscript{19} and the Mbh\textsuperscript{20} are found common to the Purāṇas. Some of the Vedic myths and legends have undergone marked transformations in the two epics. The KSS\textsuperscript{21} also contains certain legends which have been narrated in the epics. Similarly, Buddhist Jātakas also narrate some legends explaining the previous incarnations of Lord Buddha. Some of the legends found in the Buddhist Jātakas are already found to be narrated in the epic MB.

**VARIOUS KINDS OF LEGENDS**

The legends are of various nature according to their different aims and objects. Taking this into consideration the Indian legends can be classified into thirteen divisions, viz. – Moral, Brāhmaṇical, Heroic, Ascetic, Erotic, Flood, \textit{Harana}, Sage, King, Birth, \textit{Avatāra}, Slaying or \textit{Vadha} and Miscellaneous ones.

(1) **Moral Legends:** The legend of Dadhici, Sāvitrī and Satyavān, Śibi, Yayāti, Saubhari, Nāciketa, Nala-Damayantī and that of Hariśchandra etc.

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19. VR, I,56-60 (Triśanku legend, Amborīśa legend, Ṛṣyaśringa legend etc.).
21. KSS Noravahana Janaka Lambaka, 21-259, (Jimutavāhana)
    Ibid, Kathāpitha Lambaka, 3 (Brahmadatta) etc.
are the examples of moral legends. All these legends are aimed at imparting some moral or ethical lessons.

(2) **Brāhmanical Legends**: The legends of Visvāmitra and Vaśiṣṭha relating the quarrel between them and those of Rṣyaśrṅga, king Parīkṣit, Āruni, Upamanyu etc are the examples of Brāhmanical legend. The legends are of utmost importance to have an idea of social condition of India of an earl age.

(3) **Heroic Legends**: The legends of the slaying of Vṛtrāsur by Indra, those of Abhimanyu, Paraśurāma, Karṇa and the fierce fight of Arjuna with Kirāṭa, the legend of Viṣṇa and again those of Kṛṣṇa's fight with Bāṇāsura and Śisupāla etc. are the examples of heroic legends. These legends are found to have received tremendous response owing to the personal features of the characters involved, which have been constantly drawing admiration from the listeners.

(4) **Ascetic Legends**: The legends of Vālmīki, Kapila, Dhruva, Prahlāda, Cyavana, etc. are examples of Ascetic legends. The characters involved therein are setting some ideals for the listeners.

(5) **Erotic Legends**: The legends of Purūravā and Urvaśī, Rukmini and Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa Usā and Aniruddha, Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā,
Yama and Yamī, Udayana and Vāsavadattā etc. are erotic legends. These legends are known for their entertaining nature.

(6) Flood Legends: The legends of Manu and the fish, the drowning of Dwārakā after the Vaikuṇṭhaprayāna of Kṛṣṇa etc. are instances of flood legends. These legends contain importance from the view point of cosmogonical considerations.

(7) Haraṇa Legends: The legends of Rukminī-haraṇa, Subhadrā-haraṇa, Pradyumna-haraṇa, Go-Vatsa-haraṇa by Brahmā, Vastra-haraṇa of Draupadī, Pārijāta-haraṇa, Syāmantaka-haraṇa etc. are the haraṇa legends. The flavour of heroism contained in these legends is known for their wide ranging acceptance.

(8) Sage Legends: The legends of Viśvāmitra, Vaśiṣṭha, Kaṇva, Agastya, Kapila, Jamadagni, Durvāsā, Vyāsa, Nārada etc. are the sage legends. These legends, it seems, are aimed at setting some standards of higher morality and spirituality.

(9) King Legends: The legends of king Māndhātā, Bharata, Bhagīratha, Ambariśa, Sagara, Veṇu, Pṛthu, Bhagadatta, Jarāsandha, Indradyumna, Puraṇijaya etc. are king legends. The general traits of the main characters
involved in these legends are noticed to be the intense endeavour to accomplish some common good.

(10) Birth Legends: The legends of the birth of Kṛṣṇa, the birth of Pradyumna, the birth of Atri, Bhṛgu etc. may be cited as birth legends. The mood of wonder or marvel contained in these legends is found to be very much entertaining.

(11) Avatāra Legends: The incarnation of Lord Visnu as fish, Boar, Vāmana etc., the Kirāta incarnation of Lord Śiva, the Sītā incarnation of Lakṣmī, the Śisupāla and other incarnations of Jaya and Vijaya etc. are Avatāra legends. These legends bear importance from the view point of the history of religion.

(12) Vadha Legends: The legends of the slaining of Vṛttāsura, Putanā, Bakāsura, Dhenukāsura, Meghanāda, Śisupāla etc. are instances of the Vadha legends. Establishing the triumph of righteousness over evil force, appears to be the objective of these legends.

(13) Miscellaneous Legends: The legends of the origin of Soma, the churning of the ocean etc. do not belong to any of the groups of legends mentioned above. Thus there may be a group of miscellaneous legends. Such legends too, have importance from various perspectives.
PARASURĀMA AS A FIGURE OF LEGENDS

The Parasurāma legend is one of the famous and important legends contained in various works of Indian literature. The legend involving Parasurāma may be included in the category of heroic legend. His heroic nature is found extensively narrated in the Purānas, epics and other Sanskrit works. He was present at the war council of Kaurava princes before the great central war of the MB.

INCARNATION AND ITS MEANING

The meaning of incarnation bears three-fold implications, viz. (1) natural origin, (2) logical explanation of its origin from Vedāntic point of view, and (3) mystic.

The ERE give us the meaning of incarnation, which is based on the natural origin of the concept of incarnation. It is stated that —

“The act of a divine or super-natural being in assuming the form of a man or animal and continuing to live in that forms upon the earth.”

Therefore, incarnation is not transmigration, where a soul passes from one individual to another. It is also different from exploits of a magician or a Holy man or a person who obtains divine powers temporarily. It is also mentioned in this book under reference that there is no such quality of

incarnation among primitive people. Because all those men and women who were endowed with divine powers must be treated as actual duties for the primitive people, not as manifestation of certain gods or demons. But afterwards they came to be treated as Incarnation of certain god. But the highest developed form of Incarnation is found in Christianity.

In the Indian context, the doctrine of Incarnation originated in the Vedas and the Purāṇas. The developed form of the doctrine of Incarnation in the Vedas appears in the Epics. But in the Purāṇas, the doctrine of Avatāra is fully developed. Purāṇas categorically mention the number and description of various Avatāras of Viṣṇu. But the number of Avatāra is different in different Purāṇas. While some Purāṇas speak of twenty four Avatāras, some others speak of twenty-two and some seventeen. But the number commonly accepted is ten. They are – Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Dwarf, Parasurāma, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, and Kalki. Among them nine have already been accompanied. Only the Kalki is stated yet to come Regarding the Avatāras of Viṣṇu, Wilking pointed out that Avatāras differ from one another in different ways.23

23. Some of the Avatāras are of an entirely comical character, others however, are probably based on historical events, the leading personage of which was gradually endowed with divine attributes, until he was regarded as the incarnation of the deity himself. HM, p. 121
Incarnations of Viṣṇu have been classified into three categories, Viz. (i) complete incarnation (ii) partial incarnation of a permanent nature (iii) partial incarnation of a temporary nature. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa²⁴ both are the example of the first one. Buddha is in the second category and Parasurāma belongs to the third one.

It may be mentioned that the concept of Viṣṇu in the Vedas is quite different from the Purānic one. Here Viṣṇu, the son of Aditi is an old vedic God and he is represented as one of the twelve Ādityas. In the MB also Viṣṇu is mentioned as one of the Ādityas. Viṣṇus gradual rise to importance in the later Vedic period is mainly because he is conceived in the Vedas as being identified with sacrifice itself. Thus he is worshipped as Yajña – Nārāyaṇa.²⁵

According to the logical point of view, the idea of incarnation or Avatāra came to be developed out of Vedānta. Śri Aurobindo Ghose, a saint philosopher holds that the word incarnation is used in a definite sense in religion.²⁶

²⁴. ete cāṁśakalāḥ pumśaḥ kṛṣṇastu bhagavān svayam. BP. X
²⁵. VHI, p. 2.
²⁶. “In the west, this believe has never really stamped itself upon the mind because it has been presented through exoteric Christianity as a theological dogma without any roots in the reason and general consciousness and attitude towards life. But in India it has grown up and persisted as logical outcome of the Vedāntic view of life and taken firm root in the consciousness of race. Essays on the Gītā, pp. 212-213.
However, A.C. Das differs from Aurobindo and says that incarnation is a mystery. It cannot be logically interpreted.\textsuperscript{27} According to him, the concept of incarnation is found in the Vedāntic texts, which teach us that the Brahman manifests himself in the form of the universe. But the aspirant realize in the ultimate stage that the Brahman is spread itself through the world. It means that every finite spirit is an embodiment of Brahman. But this is conditioned by ignorance. Therefore, the incarnation is different from Brahmana’s manifestation.

The three points discussed above, lead to conclude that religion is a matter of one’s own personal experience. The concept of incarnation is also based on such experience and one has to go with religious experience for having an idea of incarnation.

**Why Incarnation is Necessary**

*Dhara* occupies prime importance as a central concept of Hindu-thought. It is stated that in order to establish the order of *Dharma*, God incarnated himself again and again. The other purposes are to restore right

\textsuperscript{27} The incarnation is a man with full divine consciousness, wisdom and power remaining at the same time the creator and preserver of the Universe. This is a mystery which no logic can penetrate.

* A Modern Incarnation of God., p. 5.
and put down wrong. This declaration of the *Gītā* is supported by various eminent authors like Śri Aurobindo, Swāmī Rāmakṛṣṇananda. Swāmī Rāmakṛṣṇananda also says that God can give everything we need and lead as salvation. Therefore, in the form of incarnation God comes down time to time to save the human.²⁹

According to Swāmī Rāmakṛṣṇananda, God can give us salvation. So God came down in the form of incarnation. However, it is also denied by many that there is no reality behind the deification and mythology in the case of incarnation. Here there arises some difficulties in explaining the efficacy of belief in such incarnations. The psychological explanation regarding the efficacy of belief in incarnation even if there is no God, is not satisfactory. So one needs to believe in the metaphysical

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28. bahūni me vyāśī tani janmāni tava cārjuna /
    tānyahāni veda sarvāṇi ta tvamī vettha parantapa //
    ajoapi sannavyayātmā bhūtānāmśvaroapi san /
    prakṛtiṃ svāmadvisthāya sambhavāmyātmamāyāya//
    yadā yadāhi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata/
    abhyotthānamadharmsya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham /
    paritrāṇāya śādhūnāmś vināśāya ca dūskṛtām /
    dharmasamsthāpanārthāya sambhavami yuge yuge //

*Gītā*, IV, Chap, 5-8.

explanation of the reality who reveals himself in a special way to man through incarnation. But it is unconvincing to the rationalists.

It is pointed out by Aurobindo that the divine birth has two attributes. One is a descent, the birth of God in humanity. The birth of man into the God head is second one which is known as an ascent, where man rising into the divine nature. The new birth of man is the sole purpose of incarnation.

The purpose of *Avatāra* in this regard is to reveal the divine nature in the human nature. Because of that the human nature may be transfigure itself into the divine. Incarnation is used interchangeably with *Avatāra*. But both of them meant the same thing. Incarnation assumes human forms and lives in the midst of men. From the time of their birth, they are conscious of their divinity. They have a spirit to fulfill their purpose.

**The Hindu Concept of *Avatāra*: Its Origin and Development**

It is fact admitted by so many scholars, that what is known today as the Hindu religion and culture is the outcome of an admixture of different ethnic elements, resulting in religio-cultural synthesis. In India different races or ethnic groups come to settle down in the past and intermixed with one another to help grow a common religious bond, at the
same time one and variegated, which is Hinduism. In the process of racial admixture and religio-cultural assimilation, a particular religious idea became so powerful as to overwhelm other less influential ones of the same or a different race. A favourable environment is necessary to develop for religious ideas. If the idea is healthy, it may take the form of an organic theory as a healthy seed grows into a big tree in congenial atmosphere. This is also true in the case of the concept of Avatāara. Undoubtedly, it is a key concept of Hinduism.

Rebirth and the law of Karman are the two most important pillars of post vedic Hinduism. With the theory of incarnation, added to the former, there is found a unique group, which characterizes Hinduism. The doctrine of rebirth is such a doctrine, which as Zaehner observes, "all sects and all philosophical schools accept not so much as a revealed dogma as a self evident fact of existence." As the doctrine presupposes another doctrine, the law of Karman, according to which, good or bad actions of post births determine the condition into which the individual soul is reborn, both the doctrines are intimately connected. They form two fundamental points of importance, on which all the systems of Indian


31. Ibid. p. 5
philosophy remarkably agree. If the first two doctrines are philosophical, then the third one, the theory of *Avatāra*, is a theological doctrine. Hence it is not in the Hindu philosophical works, but in the epico-purānic literature that we first come across the theory of *Avatāra*.

_Avatāra_, literally, means descent. By connotation, implies descent of the Godhead into perceptible form in the human world. The meaning of *Avatāra*, according to Monier Williams, is descent of a deity from heaven or appearance of any deity, mainly Lord Viṣṇu's ten principal incarnations on earth. The word 'prādurbhāva' has been used in the same sense in some Purāṇas. The reason why God descends into the world has been explained in the famous verses of the forth chapter of the *Gītā*. This forms the quintessence of the theory of incarnation.

**The Avataras: Myth and History**

It has been recorded in the *Vāyupurāṇa* that consequent upon a curse by sage Bhṛgu, Viṣṇu assumed seven human incarnations in addition

32. HIP, pp. 71-74.
to his three divine forms, viz. Dattatreya, Māndhātā, Paraśurāma, Rāma-Dāśarathi, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayana, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and Kalki, the future incarnation. The Matsyapurāṇa exclude the name of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva from the list. This Purāṇa include Buddha in Kṛṣṇa’s place. The Matsyapurāṇa said – “For the establishment of righteousness and destruction of Asuras, through asceticism, there was the 9th incarnation, in the form of Buddha of Divine splendor, with his eyes as beautiful as lotus, and with the sage Dvaipayana Vyāsa as the officiating priest. The Harivanśa repeats the same list of the Vap so far as human incarnations are concerned.

In the Vap, Dattātreya is said to have been born in the tenth

36. etāstisrah smṛtāstasya divyāḥ sambhūtayaḥ /
    mānusyāḥ sapta yāstasya śāpajāṁśtān nibhudhat //

Vap, 98.88.

37. kartum dharma vyavasthānaṁ asurāṇam pranāśanam /
    buddho nabamako yajñe tapasā puşkareksanaḥ devasundararūpena
dvaipayānapuraḥsarāḥ//

MP, 47.247.

38. HVI, 41.163.
Tretā age, Māndhātā, in the fifteenth Tretā, Paraśurāma, in the nineteenth Tretā, Rāma, in the twenty-fourth Tretā, Kṛṣṇa Daipayana in the twenty-eight Dvāpara and Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, also in the same age. The future incarnation Kalki will appear towards the end of the Kali age.

In this context the following two points may be taken note of:

(i) The purāṇist in this account seems to emphasize the historicity of the seven human incarnations by placing each one of them in a particular time

39. tretāyuge tu daśame dattātreya vabhūvaha /
    naṣte dharme caturthasca markaṇḍeya purahsaraḥ //

40. pañcamaḥ pañcadasyaṃtu tretāyāṁ samvabhūvaha /
    māndhātuścakravartitve tashthau talhyapuraḥsaraḥ //

41. ekonavinśe tretāyāṁ sarvakstrāntako bhavat /
    jamadagnyastathā saṣṭha viśvāmitrapuraḥ sarah //

42. caturvinśe yuge rāmo vaśisthena purodhasā /
    saptamo rávanasyārthe jajne daśarathātmajāḥ //

43. aṣṭamo dvāpare viṣṇurāṣṭavimśe purāśarat /
    vedavāsastato jajne jatukarṇa purahsaraḥ //

44. tathaiva navamo viṣṇurādityāḥ kaśyapātmajāḥ /
    devakyā vasudevāttu brahmārgya purahsaraḥ //

45. kalkirvisnuyaśā nāma parāśaryaḥ prātapaṅvān //
    daśamo bhāvyasambhuto jājñavalkyapuraḥsaraḥ //
cycle as per the puranic calendar of the four ages, an indigenous tool of
time calculating for recording historical events.

(ii) In the standardized list, the total number of incarnations is ten
including the three celestial manifestations. But the number of human
incarnations is seven in contradiction to the fact that only five human
incarnations are referred in the stereotyped list. The Vedic Aryans, who
called their country “the land of the seven ecivers” or sapta-sindhavaḥ and
spoke of sapta sūryāḥ and sapta mānusa as an epithet of Agni belonging to
the seven tribes⁴⁶, seem to have given a special meaning to the mystical
number seven. The seven number was also very significant because of the
seven stars in the Ursa Major, referred to in the Ṛgveda as Saptarṣin⁴⁷ or
ṛṣayāḥ sapta daivyāḥ.⁴⁸ This probably led to the subsequent development
of the idea of the seven ancient holy sages and the seven human

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⁴⁷. viśvakarmā vimaṇāṁ ādviḥāyāḥ dhātā vidhata parāmāt sandṛk /
    teṣāmiṣṭāṇi samiśā mahanti yatrā saptarṣin para ekamāhuḥ //
    RV. X. 82.2.
⁴⁸. sahastomāḥ sahacchandasa abṛṭaḥ sahaprāmāḥ ṛṣayāḥ sapta daivyāḥ /
    purveśāṁi panthāmanudṛṣya dhīrā anvālevire rathyo na raśmin //
    Ibid, XI, 30.7.
incarnations. It is found in the famous *Nadiśūkta* that rivers are arranged in three groups, and each group consisting of seven rivers.\(^{49}\)

Rāma Jāmadagnya or Paraśurāma, Rāma Dasarathi, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, the Buddha and Kalki, the five human *Avatāras* are included in the standardized list of ten incarnations. The number of the human incarnations varies in different lists of the epics and the Purāṇas. But it is an ancient tradition that the system of arranging them chronologically into a composite group of ten. There is a lot of public debate as to whether in the stories of the human manifestations of the Divinity, any historical care can be traced or whether they are to be accepted as simply mythical. In this context, there appears a need to have a clear appraisal of the denotations of the two terms namely ‘myth’ and history.

History is prima facie a record in chronological order of what happened in the past. But myth is what has not happened. Therefore, myth is not history. Myth denoting originally an ancient legend, generally recited in a religious ceremony, cannot be accepted merely as a term opposed to history, which is also not free from subjective elements. The ancient Indian historical tradition as preserved in the epics and the Purāṇas

\(^{49}\) *Ibid*, X. 75.1.
is narrated in mythical form as part of a religio-cultural tradition. The epico puranic stories are definitely not secular historical records in chronological order. These stories seem to have difficult a lot of additions and alterations as was but natural in the case of their primary oral forms. Een when they were first written down or at the time when purānas and epics were edited and re-edited as they are supposed to have been, it was not done with a view to eliminating the suspected unhistorical, allegorical or imaginary elements from the texts. The myth and mystery, which appear in the epics and the Purānas to have outgrown and encircled the historical care of truth in the bardic tales and ballads, can be best understood with the help of awareness of the nature and meaning of myth and its relation to history. In this context, Nihar Ranjan Roy remarks –

"Myth is not mithyā, not fictional; it is not a legend or fable, or a mere tale. In actuality it is a true story of the life of any society, the essence extracted out of the very process of human life of a given time and space. A myth is a socio-psychological phenomenon, and hence a reality which historians can hardly afford to ignore."

Historical truth is mixed up with or coloured by the religio-cultural outlook of the race or community in myth. From the religious

point of view, it is more important how the past events have been shaped in the bardic tales or the stories of the *Itihāsapurāṇa* tradition in accordance with the Brāhmanical philosophy of life than what happened in the past. The Brāhmanical hierarchy was as a rule opposed to the apotheosis of human beings. But when with the growth and development of the concept of human manifestation of the Divinity, some sages and kings began to be recognized as *Avatāras*, they were not interested in keeping a record of the teachings and events of the lives of the *Avatāras* since their thoughts and actions did not reflect the Brāhmanical thought and religion beyond a certain extent. Therefore, either they kept silent about whatever thoughts or events of those *Avatāras* did not conform to their religio-cultural viewpoint, or allegorized, altered, reoriented and mystified some of the facts and events in the lives of the *Avatāras* to serve their own ends. Sometimes, myth was deliberately entertained in order to hush up some unpleasant truth. As for example, in the *Mahāummogga Jātaka*\(^{51}\), it is recorded that Jāmbavati, the wife of Kṛṣṇa was a low-caste woman (Candāla). On the other hand, the *Purāṇas* told that she is the daughter of a fear (Ṛkṣa) king. Thus *Purāṇa* concealing her unpleasant but true parentage.\(^{52}\)


\(^{52}\) VP, IV, 13.18, p. 31.
One major point of difference between a historical story or a myth is that while a chronological sequence is followed in the former, it is absent in the later. Therefore, the accounts of *Avatāras* in the epics and Purāṇas are neither purely mythical nor wholly historical, but mytho-historical.

**Paraśurāma as an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu**

In the list of in incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, there are found five human incarnations. Among them Paraśurāma or Rāma Jāmadagnya is a prominent one. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Paraśurāma is described as appearing before Rāma with an open challenge. Here Rāma’s superiority is ultimately proved. Paraśurāma’s haughtiness is also focused.

Vedic literature is silent regarding Paraśurāma’s name. But Jamadagni is a hymnist in the *Ṛgveda*. The *Aitareya brāhmaṇa* regards Jamadagni as the composer of the *Ṛgvedic Āpri hymn*. The priest of the

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53. āpri devatā, jamadagni ṛṣhi, RV. X, p. 110
54. (i) sasarparīramatīṁ vādhīmānā vrīhanimirīya jamadagnidattā /
    ā sūryasya duhitā tatāna śravo deveśvamṛtamjuryam //
    RV.III, 53.15
(ii) sasarparīrabharattuyamebhhyodadhi śṛvāḥ pāṇchajanyāsukṛṣṭīṣu/
    sā paksyānancyamāyuryadhānā yām’me palastijamadagnayodaduḥ/
    RV.III, 53.16
Jamadagni family are collectively referred to by Viśvāmitra in Rgvedic verse.\textsuperscript{55} According to the epics and Purānas Gādhi had a daughter, named Satyavatī and a son, named Viśvāmitra. Richika of the Bhārgava family married Satyavatī. Their son was Jamadagni, whose son was Paraśurāma.

The \textit{Mahābhārata} narrates the story of Paraśurāma in many parvans, viz. the \textit{Vanaparvan}, the \textit{Sāntiparvan} etc. In the \textit{Purāṇa} literature, Paraśurāma is one of the familiar personalities.

Paraśurāma is taken as an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. In this connection, Annie Besant has given an interesting account of Viṣṇu’s ten \textit{Avatāras}. According to her, the first four \textit{Avatāras} are fantastic and incomprehensible to the modern mind. But she gives convincing explanation to the \textit{Avatāras} described in the Purāṇas.\textsuperscript{55} From this explanation it appears that if Purāṇas studied in proper spirit, one will

\begin{quote}
55. “When you read the Purāṇas, you consistently get the fact on the higher plane described in terms of the lower, with the result that it seems unintelligible, sums, incomprehensible; then you have what is called an allegory, that is, a reality which looks like a fancy down here, but is a deeper truth than the illusion of physical matter and is nearer to the reality of things, than the things which you call objective and real.” \textit{Avatāras}, p. 76
\end{quote}
understand the meaning of *Avatāras* in a better way. The first three *Avatāras* i.e. *Matsya, Kurma, Varāha* are animals. Here, it appears baffling to one’s mind as to why God incarnates Himself in the form of these lower animals. Annie Basant is of opinion that for God man is not only the deserving vessel to be used for manifestations. In the Purāṇas it is found that these three *Avatāras* are accepted as manifestation of Brahmā, though they are included in the list of the ten incarnation of Viṣṇu at the same time.

Shakti M. Gupta gives another convincing account of incarnations of Viṣṇu. According to him, the planets are also considered as connected with the incarnations of Viṣṇu.

The discussion may be summed up with the following quotation

“As Viṣṇu comes to earth to preserve law and righteousness, the auspicious planets also likewise make their appearance. Therefore, the incarnations of Viṣṇu also considered as incarnations of the planets. For example, Rāmachandra is Śūrya, Krṣṇa of Soma, the moon; Nṛṣimha of Mars; Buddha of Mercury; the Dwarf Vāmana is Bṛhaspati or Jupitor; Paraśurāma is Venus; the Tortoise is Saturn; the Boar is Rāhu and the fish is Ketu.”

56. *Viṣṇu and his incarnation*, p. 2
Paraśurāma an Incarnation of Viṣṇu

In addition to the younger portion of the Rāmāyaṇa (1.75.17), in the Nārāyaṇiya section of the Mokṣadharma Parva of the Mahābhārata which is accepted as a late addition, we come across references to Paraśurāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Similarly in the Vibhūtiyoga of the Bhagavadgītā (10, 31) Paraśurāma is identified with Kṛṣṇa – Rāma śastrabhrta maham. As it appears from the epics, though the theory of Avatāra was neither fixed nor canonized, still Bhārgava Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu was in the process of making. In this consideration, Paraśurāma is regarded as standing for the planet Venus (Śukra).

57. “tretāyuge bhaviṣyāmi rāmo bhṛgukuladvahāḥ /
kṣatram catsādayiṣyāmi samyṛddhabalāhvanam // (12,326.77)