I. Introduction

The birth of a myth

A myth is a product of imagination, observation, experience and communication of men. It is the expression of accumulated feelings of awe, admiration, wonder, gratitude, fear, apprehension... In it a poetic human feeling is articulated, a particular culture is depicted, a certain philosophy is contained, and religious reverence is filled. A myth is, as Dandekar\(^1\) remarks, “an efficient medium through which the primitive people expressed their religious ideology”. Or, as O'Flaherty remarks\(^2\), “a myth is like a palimpsest on which generation after generation has engraved its own layer of messages”.

The rich imagination, which has a continuous observation as its basis, may be the starting point of a myth. It meanders through fields that have no boundaries. The imagination stretches to Nature and her phenomena; to the measureless heaven; to the bottomless netherworld and to the waters; to the countless planets; to supernatural and extraordinary human beings; to insignificant animals, trees, plants, creepers and even up to the non-living things. This imagination could promote the impulsive desire of expression. Then communication starts. It becomes the means of exchanging the experiences of men, and carries the imagination which is thus stretched. In this way a myth may be born by eloquent

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\(^1\) Dandekar, ‘Some Aspects of the History of Hinduism’, p. 34.

\(^2\) O'Flaherty, ‘Sexual Metaphors and Animal symbols in Indian mythology’. p. 2.
storytellers. "Just as the elements of language, such as, sounds or phonemes are meaningless in isolation, and they assume significance only when in combination with other phonemes, so also the elements of myth, the individual narrative elements, the persons or objects, are meaningless in themselves, and take on significance only through their relation with each other"\(^1\). Thus, myth is usually called a system of word symbol or the *legomenon* ‘the thing said’\(^2\).

If imagination is the starting point, communication may be the essence of forming a myth. Imagination and communication might have first started from natural phenomena, and then slowly widened to the human world, and they have since wonderfully enrich the life of men. The content and mode of myths may be similar or may be different. Similar experiences engender similar views in men's minds, and produce a similar myth. Hence, a similar myth can occur sometimes coincidently in different regions, and sometimes even a myth of the same origin can take different forms in different times, religions and literatures.

Now, the two best known and frequently referred to mythologies are undoubtedly the Greek and the Indian ones. The Greek mythology is theocentric, the Indian may be called anthropocentric\(^3\). The Indian gods are, “for all their supernatural

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\(^1\) Kirk, ‘Levi Strauss and structural approach, Myth-Its meaning and functions in ancient and other cultures’, p. 42.


\(^3\) For instance, the Greek Prometheus had incurred the endless punishment due to his bringing fire from the heaven for men, but the Indian Mātariśvan and Bhṛgus were esteemed on par with the gods for the same act.
dignity, still Nature-personifications of the elemental principles of the cosmic play— not such urbanized formulations as the Olympians of the Greeks”¹. Greek mythology is simple, and has some consistency, hence it is easy to understand; while Indian mythology is complicated, heterogeneous and it does not have uniformity, as a result it does not always lead us to clear perception. Indian mythology is, as Dandekar² remarks, “a jungle and not a deliberately laid out park or garden”. In the jungle innumerable things ceaselessly take birth, grow and die over immeasurable times. The creepers can embrace, and entangle this and that species of trees and plants at any time, to any extent. Therefore, in the jungle, ploughing the right direction through a heavily entangled way may be very difficult. In the same way it is not easy to segregate the relationship between the crowds of deities and mythical beings who are born and grow up in the jungle of Indian mythology.

**Indian and Greco-Roman mythology**

No mythology could possibly compete with the Indian in its variety, exuberance and rich contents, in the same manner as no laid out park can compete with the diversities of a jungle. The divinities, of the Greek-Rome origin and also of many other mythologies, are tightly bottled up in their respective myths, keeping the same nature and colour throughout the ages, neither extending nor growing. They appear to be changed only through different interpretations. They are no more gods for worship. They may be said to be, ‘dead immortals’, or ‘fossilized divinities’. However, the divinities of Indian mythology are still growing and

¹ Zimmer, 'The kings and the corpse', p. 284.

² Dandekar, 'God in Hindu thought', p. 3.
extending both in number and nature. They appear and disappear, and also reappear. People worship the gods of the myths even in the present days. The gods are ceaselessly changing their mode and colour. They are thus pragmatic. Therefore, they may be called ‘living immortals’ or ‘existing gods’.

The concept and power of the gods in Indian mythology

The concept of ‘god’, or ‘divinity’ in Indian mythology, is difficult to define in a word. It may have first been distilled from the contemplation of Nature. “The activities of Nature are partly helpful and partly noxious. A beneficial force or activity like fire or water or wind, when personified, becomes a god. Injurious activities or experiences such as drought, blasting of crops, darkness, illness, etc., are personified as demons”\(^1\). Hence, the gods, the devas\(^2\), in Indian mythology, are shining and bright\(^3\). They are the celestial folk (devokāsa) who possess the

\(^1\) Griswold, ‘The Religion of the Rg Veda’ p. 88. Therefore, in the case of a ‘special god’ the name of the gracious thing became the very name of the god, e.g., dyaus ‘sky’, agni ‘fire’, sūrya ‘sun’, uśas ‘dawn’….

\(^2\) Besides the deva, the gods are called variously in Sanskrit literature by such names as amṛta, amara, sura (in later times). In the Pāli texts, the names devatā and mārīsa are used. Therein, the deva is used especially for the gods of tāvatimsa heaven, the term devatā is applied more widely and it is used even for the goddesses, and when the gods address each other, the term mārīsa is used and sometimes the Buddha is also called by the gods by this term mārīsa.

\(^3\) Actually the term ‘deva’ is from the root div, to shine, or to play with and amuse oneself. The Nirukta. VII. 15 explains the meaning of deva as: ‘devo dānād vā dipanād vā dyotanād vā dyuṣṭhāno bhavatītī vā. In the Pāli text (Maṅgalasuttavaṇṇaṁ in Khuddakapātha aṭṭhakathā, 5. 2. p. 98), the ‘deva’ is defined as, ‘dibbāṇi ti devā, pañcahi kāmagunehi kīḷāni attano vā
supernatural power. In Pāli literature, the bright shining lights of the devas is admired by human beings. Their appearance is described in the Dīghanikāya as:

"Then a tremendous light shone over Mount Vediya, illuminating the village of Ambasanḍā, so great was the power of the gods, so that in the surrounding villages they were saying: Look, Mount Vediya is on fire today, it's burning, it's in flames! What is the matter, that Mount Vediya and Ambasanḍā are lit up like this?' and they were so terrified that their hair stood on end." (Maurice Walshe's translation)

siriyā jotiṁ ti attho'. Philosophically the term is understood (Radhakrishnan, 'Indian Philosophy', Vol. I. p. 72) as, 'deva is one who gives to man.' God is deva because he gives the whole world. The learned man who imparts knowledge to fellow man is also deva. The sun, the moon, the sky are devas because they give light to all creation. Father and mother and spiritual guides are also deva. Even a guest is a deva.

1 Rhys Davids ('Buddhist India', p. 256) remarks that in Buddhism the gods were considered as the souls in nature, and they had no existence outside the brains of the men who made them. They are the ideas, a rough kind of scientific hypothesis, and the logical corollaries of the human soul. And the external souls, the gods, were therefore identical in origin and nature with the souls supposed to live inside human bodies. But the very men who made these external souls, the gods, looked upon them as objective realities, quite different from their own souls. The gods were always changing, i.e., men's ideas about them were always changing, moving, being modified. The arrival of a new god meant the birth of a new idea.'

2 Sakkapañhasutta, Dīg. II. 8, p. 195.

tena kho pana samayena vediyako pabbato atiriva obhāsajāto hoti ambasanḍā ca brāhmaṇagāmo yathā tam devānam devānuṁbhāvena. Apissudam parito gāmesu manussā
The power of the devas are also described in Pāli text\(^1\) as:

"Owing to the power of the devas, the Indasāla cave, the rough passages became smooth, the narrow paths became wide, and the pitch-dark cavern it became bright". (Maurice Walshe’s translation)

**Achievement of godhood**

In most of the Indian literature the gods who were originally the mortals\(^2\) are said to acquire this bright feature, or godhood of immortality\(^3\), by different means. The Vedas tell that the gods earn immortality usually by tapas\(^4\) or by sacrifice\(^5\), or also

\[\text{evamāham su, "īdittassu nāmajja vediyako pabbato jhāyatisu nāmajja vediyako pabbato jalatisu nāmajja vediyako pabbato kiṃsu nāmajja vediyako pabbato atiriva obhāsajāto ambasaṇḍā ca brāhmaṇagāmo "ti samviggā lomahaṭṭhajātā ahesuṃ.}\]

\(^1\) Sakkapaññhasutta, Dīg. II. 8. p. 198.

\[\text{indasālaguhā visamā santī samā sampādi, sambādhā santī urundā sampādi, andhakāro guhāyaṃ antaradhāyi, āloko udapādi yathā tam devānaṃ devānubhāvena.}\]

\(^2\) TS. VII. 4.2.1, and in the AV. IV. 11. 6 it is indicated that the gods were living originally on earth and later on they ascended to heaven, quitting the body; devāḥ svarūrūruruhūrhitvā śarīram; and also see AV. XI. 5. 19. In Pāli literature (Pāyāsi sutta. Dīg.) too, life span of a god is said to be limited. The span is a thousand years, and one day of human world is equal to one hundred years of the gods. So ten thousand years of human world is the life span of the gods.

\(^3\) RV. X. 53. 10: padā guhyāṇi kartana yena devāsaḥ amṛtatvam ānasub /

\(^4\) RV. X. 167. 1; AV. XI. 5. 19.

\(^5\) RV. X. 13. 4.
by drinking Soma\(^1\). The Buddhist literature tells that the gods were human beings in some of their previous lives, and they gained the godhood generally by meritorious deeds. In addition to the meritorious deeds, having faith in the Buddha and following his Dhamma are said to affect the next life of a person, and these qualities are the other means to be reborn in the heaven as a god\(^2\). Therefore, there is always a possibility of losing godhood and falling down to the lower states by the dissipation of mindfulness and by spending an excessive amount of time addicted to merriment, play and enjoyment\(^3\). To the question whether there are the devas (kim atthi devā) who return to the world, the Buddha answers:

“whatever the devas have been malevolent are returners to a state of being such or so, whatever the devas have not been malevolent are not returners to a state of being such or so”\(^4\). (Horner’s translation)

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\(^1\) RV. IX. 106. 8; 109. 2.

\(^2\) Thus Bimbisāra, who was faithful devotee of the Buddha in his lifetime, became a powerful meritorious yakkha (the beings who are sometimes more powerful than the gods. Sometimes, even Indra, the king of the devas, is called a yakkha) called Janavasava owing to the Buddha’s teaching and his own complete faith (Janavasava sutta, Dīg., II. 5. pp. 148-161). Another account is also found in the Sakkapaññasutta (Dīg. II. 8. p. 198); of a woman called Gopikā after leaving this world, reborn as a son of devas named Gopaka.

\(^3\) Brahmacālasutta, Dīg. I. 1. pp. 16-17.

\(^4\) Kanṇakatthala sutta, Maj. II. 4. 10. p. 338; ye te devā sabyābajjhā te devā āgantāro itthattam, ye te devā abyābajjhā te devā anāgantāro itthattan’ti.
On rare occasions the Epics too tell that the state of godhood is achieved by good amount of merits but can also have a downfall when the merits are wasted\(^1\).

**The status of the gods**

The status of the gods differs from religion to religion and from literature to literature. It has invariably changed according to the condition of human world prevalent at that time.

The Vedic gods are heavenly beings, presiding over the cosmic functions, they have power with knowledge and are beautiful, benevolent, upholders of moral order. No human being is considered to be higher than god. Many gods are said to create the universe, but they are also said to have appeared later than this world’s production, i.e., later than *eka* and *kāma*\(^2\). In fact, it appears that even in the period of Vedas which one may call ‘the period of myths’, human beings were not totally overpowered by the gods, though men attribute the gods with unshaken authorities, eulogize their unmatched power and beg them to forgive their human follies.

The gods, who are mentioned in Pāli literature, are totally different in nature from the Vedic ones. In the early Buddhist literature the divinities have neither absolute power nor do they rule over the human world. Their power of ruling over the

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\(^1\) *Mbh. V. 11.* has an account of a human king Nahuṣa was enthroned as a king of *devas* owing to his meritorious deeds. However, he was dethroned and fell down to the earth by his excessive indulgence in the pleasure of power.

\(^2\) *RV. X. 129. 6.*
universe in the Vedas has totally diminished. The Buddha\textsuperscript{1}, the central persona of this religion occupies the highest position among all the beings. The Buddha is the man who is superior to all other beings, human and divine, by his knowledge of the truth (Dhamma). No one can be equal to the Buddha. He is the teacher of all human beings and the *devas*\textsuperscript{2}. The gods here are still bright beings, however, they are not liberated from worldly enjoyments. Therefore, they are subject to serving the Buddha and Buddhism. By virtue of their meditative power, virtue and wisdom and also by their miraculous power\textsuperscript{3} the position of the gods is higher.

\begin{itemize}
\item[1] In Buddhist literature not only the Gotama Buddha but also as many as seven or twenty-four other previous Buddhas are mentioned. It is said that the different Buddhas exist in different eons, sometimes one Buddha in an eon, sometimes two or three. However, no Buddha is born when the life span of human beings is longer than 100000 years because if it is too long old age and death are not recognizable. Again, no Buddha is born when life span is too short because there is no time to exhort men. These Buddhas are but, as a whole, not historical but mythological.
\item[2] Maj. II. 4. 6 p. 310 and also Thera. 16. Visatinipāto. P. 266; *buddho ca kho kāruṇiko mahesi, yo satthā lokassa sadevakassa.*
\item[3] Sāriputta's meditative power and his wisdom, and also Moggallana's power of performing miracles (*iddhi*) make the *devas* often pay homage to them. The *devas* visit them in several suttas to hear them preach. It is said that at the time when Sāriputta declared his death, the earth, being unable to bear his virtue, trembled to its watery boundaries. *Devas*, Sakka, and Mahā Brahmā came to wait upon him at his deathbed. Moggallāna once visited Sakka to see if the latter practices properly in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. But when Moggallana found that Sakka was too proud of himself, he shook Sakka's palace with the
than the commoners and non-Buddhist people but lower than the Buddha and his eminent disciples. The number of the gods is affected by the appearance of a Buddha. Whenever a Buddha arises in the world, the body of devas increases and that of the asuras declines. The gods are eager to listen to the Buddha’s teaching, the Dhamma. Many of them wish to leave the body of the devas and be reborn in the human form. For it is said, in Buddhism, that in the heavenly-world it is almost impossible to get full liberation. Therefore “a god needs to return to the human state before gaining enlightenment.” The joy of the devas on account of the Buddha's birth on earth is compared to that of winning over the asuras. The mythical episodes and accounts of the deities are narrated generally in connection with the Buddha. In fact, at every important point the deities come to the Buddha. The gods even indirectly argue with the human beings on the matter of point of his toe till Sakka was horrified, and then his pride was humbled (Cūlanāthāsankhaya sutta, Maj. I. 4. 7).

1 Sakkapaṇhasutta, Dīg. II. 8. p. 199; yadā tathāgata loke uppajjanti arahanto sammāsam buddhā, dībā kāyā paripūrenti, hāyanti asurakāyāti.

2 Sakkapaṇhasutta, Dīg. II. 8. p. 211:
cutāham diviyā kāyā, āyum hitvā amānusam, amūḍho gabbhamessāmi yattha me ramati mano

3 Maurice Walshe, trans. of Dīg., p. 588, n. 619.

4 Nālaka sutta, SN. III. 11, no, 68.

5 In the most important four events in the life of the Buddha, i.e., birth, renunciation, enlightenment, and death, the gods came to support him. At the time of his birth, four Mahābrahmās had come to receive him so that his body should not be touched by other foul elements. At the time of his renunciation, Sakka showed him four objects in order to avert him from the mundane world and to aspire him to renounce. At the time of his enlightenment
the Buddha’s *nibbāna*. Because of the fact that the only preoccupation of the *devas* was to serve and protect the Buddha and the Dhamma, the gods in the Pāli literature are quite colourless in their characteristics and due to their monotonous personalities even their mythological attractiveness appears to be much less.

The gods of the Epic may be divided broadly into two groups, i.e., the three higher gods (*trimūrti*) and the general divinities. The former gods are considered to be beyond the human boundary, while the latter are overpowered several times by outstanding men. The common divinities in this period have become much more humanized in their characteristics and are often associated with human beings. Their falling in love with human beings is not an unusual thing. Then they become fathers of human beings, and get deeply involved in human work. Several times the gods deceive human beings and the demons as well. As depicted again Brahmā Sahampati requested him to preach his Dhamma. When he took final *nibbāna*, the *devas* came again, and praised his blessed life.

1 Mahāparinibbāna sutta, Dīg. II. 3, p. 122: The Malla chiefs wanted to burn the body of the Buddha after carrying him by the south gate. However, the body was not moved because the devas wished to carry him to the north of the city...through the eastern gate to the Malla’s shrine. Anuruddha, the disciple of the Buddha arbitrated this invisible and silent quarrel.

2 Thus, Aśvins are lustfully attracted by Sukanyā (Mbh. III. 123). The five gods, including Indra and Agni, are involved in Nala and Damayantī’s love story (Mbh. III. 53-54). The six gods, Sūrya, Indra, Dharma and others are invoked by Kunti, and she begot Karnā and five Pāṇḍavas. The daughter of the Sun Tapatī fell in love with the human king Sarivaraṇa (Mbh. I. 160). Agni made love with a daughter of a human king of Māhiṣumati and married the princess, and protected that kingdom (Mbh. II. 28).
in the Pāli literature, they are not free from jealousy, passion, anger, deceit and pride. Some gods, occasionally, wish to give up and run away from their godhood when they encounter certain difficulties\(^1\). When they felt fear they easily surrendered to the stronger gods\(^2\). At the same time, however, their power is still considered as immense, they are still worshipped. They grant boons to or curse human beings in keeping with the level of their devotion.

It is the time that changes the position and the status of the gods. In the age of war, Indra wielded his utmost power. At that time of tapas Brahma and Śiva encouraged the tapasvins or the penance-doers with a bounty of boons. When the human world was thrown into disorder men did not allow the gods to remain only in their heaven to enjoy their prosperity and privilege, instead, they pulled the gods down to the human world and let them accomplish the work of saving the world. Then they worshipped the incarnations of the gods. In the same way when meditation was considered as the most valuable accomplishment, the gods were no more considered as superior to the human meditators. Man elevated the sages or the outstanding meditators much above the gods. The Buddha is called the

\(^1\) Thus, the earth wished to give up her earth-godhood (bhūmitva) when she was assailed by wicked men (XII. 49. 63). Agni tried to withdraw himself from Fire-godhood when he realized that effulgence of the sage Āṅgirasas exceeded than his own (III. 207). The sage’s light illuminated the whole universe. Agni, then, greatly aggrieved by that effulgence, tried to give up his own Fire-godhood.

\(^2\) Thus, when Indra was alarmed by Skanda’s power he folded his hands in fear (Mbh. III. 216) and surrendered himself to Skanda.
satthā devamanussānām the teacher of gods and men\(^1\). The gods begged the sages and heroes to help them. Thus Indian mythology depicts the society well while it keeps changing its nature and complexion according to the demand of the changing times and people. Hopkins\(^2\) rightly remarks that “in the Vedic hymns man fears the gods, and imagines God. In the Brāhmaṇas man subdues the gods, and fears God. In the Upaniṣads man ignores the gods and becomes God”. It may be added to this that in Buddhist literature the gods serve men.

**Sources and aim of the present work**

Three literatures, namely, the Vedas, Pāli literature and the Epics, are the sources of this thesis. Among them again the Ṛgveda, the canonical Pāli and the Mahābhārata are specially referred to. In addition to these texts, some selected deities and mythological episodes of China and Korea are compared with Indian mythology and the deities. Reference to these is sometimes from the published books, but when books are not available oral lore and legends are also referred to. The reasons of selection of these texts are:

The Vedas are unfathomable sources of Indian culture and invaluable pieces of literature for mankind. However, it is also generally believed nowadays that not much is left in the Vedas which is yet to be studied. And it is true that the scope of new research has become much narrower than before. However, one may still find some less dealt with and less known aspects of the deities and find new scope of comparing them with mythology and deities of other regions. For, the same old

\(^1\) Selasutta, SN. III. 7; Ambaṭṭha sutta Dig. I. 3 etc.

\(^2\) Hopkins, ‘Religion of India’, p. 216.
Vedas always allow new interpretations, and open themselves to new approaches. Therefore without referring to the Vedas the discussion on Indian mythology itself will be baseless.

Pāli literature is another major source of Indian mythology. Its contribution to Indian mythology can never be ignored. In Pāli literature many names and even the fame of the Vedic gods have dwindled away¹, some of them have continued the same nature but have decreased in stature² whereas some have totally disappeared³. By the time of the Buddha the future great gods are warming up to take more pivotal roles⁴ while others lie dormant though their presence is recognized⁵. On the other hand several new gods have registered their names

¹ The worship of Agni is scoffed at and considered to be at par with the hocus-pocus of witchcraft and divination, Vayu, the wind-god, never very important, is just mentioned in the list of the gods. Varuna is still a power, ranked as the highest, but he is soon reduced to a tree-god or a nāga king.

² Parjanya (Pajunna) is still the rain-god.

³ Dyaus, Mitra, Savitṛ, Puṣan, the Ādityas, the Asvins, the Maruts, Aditi and Diti and Urvasī, and many more, have all disappeared. They survive only within the enclosures of the Vedic schools.

⁴ Isāna, the vigorous and youthful form of the dreaded Siva of the future, is already at the level of Soma and Varuṇa. And Pajāpati and Brahmā will soon come to be considered as co-partners with Sakka in the lordship over all the gods.

⁵ As Viṣṇu, though mentioned in the Pāli texts under the name of Veṇhu, has scarcely as yet appeared above the horizon.
among the *devas*. Not only the deities but also various types of the sages and religious practitioners, such as, tāpasa, samaṇa, bhikkhu, paribbājaka, niganṭhā, jaṭilā, ājivakā, acelā, ekasāṭa muni, isi etc., are mentioned in Pāli literature.

The Mahābhārata is a treasure house of Indian mythology. From the Vedic divinities up to the gods presently worshipped all are exhibited therein. Some are directly carried over from the Vedic gods, some are from Pāli, some are revalued, and some are elaborated or degraded.

*The relation between Indian mythology and mythologies of other countries*

It is believed that “there was probably a commercial intercourse with Babylon and other countries in Western Asia”. It is also a definite fact that some concepts prevailing in East Asia are directly accepted from India and its religions. This direct acceptance is usually made when certain concept or idea is already in existence before the new ideas come to that region. For instance, the concept of death and the ruler of death, Yama, are influenced directly by Buddhism, and it pervades throughout the East Asian countries. The name Yama is used with some phonetic change. The concept of the world of the dead is almost the same with

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1 The two *suttas*, namely, Ātānaṭiya (Dīg. III. 9) and Mahāsamaya (Dīg. II. 7) enumerate almost all the gods and all kinds of semi-divine beings, and the demons. Half among them are already named in the Vedas whereas half of them are unknown names in the Vedas, i.e., they are the new gods in the Buddha’s period. According to Rhys Davids (‘Buddhist India’, p. 220), the poets of the two *suttas*, i.e., Mahāsamaya *sutta* and Ātānaṭiya *sutta*, are anxious to include in their lists all the various beliefs.

2 Majumdar, ‘Ancient India’, p. 49.
that in Indian thought. It might be because the customs and the death obsequies were very similar even before Buddhism was introduced\textsuperscript{1}. For instance, the death ceremony in the Vedas and that observed in Korea have a striking resemblance. The concept of death-cloth which occurs in AV\textsuperscript{2} is very similar to that of Korea. The garment is said to be given by the god Savitr, and it is specially made out of trpa\textsuperscript{a} grass, and the dead man should be wrapped only in this cloth. In Korea too, even today ‘the grass material cloth, called ‘sambe’ is to be wrapped on dead persons and their close relatives as well. The Vedic people wore gold which their fathers wore before they went to heaven\textsuperscript{3}, and so did the ancient upper class Koreans. The concept of invoking the dead soul with one’s full being\textsuperscript{4} is similar to the way of ‘chesa’ or the death anniversary in Korea. People set food table and ask the soul to take food with the help of some written formula called ‘chibang’ on the day of their death. Such a similar custom obviously leads people to accept easily even the name of the death god Yama.

There are also some similarities between the different mythologies even without exchange of ideas. In almost all the mythologies, the glorified birth account of the

\textsuperscript{1} Yama in Chinese Mythology is called, 閻羅 (Yan luo), or 閻王 (Yan wang), or 羅王 (Luo wang), or 閻王爺 (Yan wang ya), and Yama in Korean Mythology is called 閻羅大王 (염라대왕, Yumla Taewang), 夜魔王 (야마, Yama, which means a being who obstructs other's work and brings disaster (魔) in the night (夜), 夜魔王 (야마대왕, Yama Taewang, the great king Yama).

\textsuperscript{2} AV. XVIII. 4. 31.

\textsuperscript{3} AV. XVIII. 4. 56.

\textsuperscript{4} AV. XVIII. 2. 21: hvyāmi te manasā mana ihemān grhāti upa jujuśāna ehi.
founder of a family and a hero is commonly found. It may be because with the help of these mystified, glorified births of the ancestors, the descendants could hold firm approval in the society. In this connection, it will be interesting to find some Korean mystic births of the originators of families. According to Samkuk-Yusa, a historio-mythological book of Korea, Hwan-In, the king of the Heaven had a son, Hwan-Wung. This son was always eager to rule over the human world. One day his father who knew his wish, looked down and saw the earthly region, the most beautiful mountainous land. He then gave the son three divine jewelry seals which were the symbols of the heavenly king, and allowed him to rule over that land. Happily Hwan-Wung came down from Heaven along with three thousand heavenly residents. With the help of the wind-god, rain-god, and the cloud-god, he taught the inhabitants of the earth about agriculture, virtue and evil, and of diseases visiting the people. He ruled the land virtuously. Then one day, a tiger and a bear came to him and earnestly begged of him to convert them to human beings. Hwan-Wung gave them a handful of mystic herb named ‘ssuk’ and twenty heads of garlic, and said ‘eat only these and if you do not come out to the sunlight for 100 days, then you will become human beings.’ The tiger restrained himself from the worldly attractions for only 21 days, and so failed to become a man, but the bear completed 100 days with her mind and body restrained, and so obtained human body. She was named as Wung-Nya (the bear lady). Having thus obtained a human body, Wung-Nya prayed to Hwan-Wung to give her a child. Then Hwan-Wung turned himself into a human being, and married her. From them a splendid child was born. They named him Dangun. When this Dangun was mature enough, he established the first Korean dynasty, Chosun. He ruled there for 1500 years peacefully, after which he returned to Heaven (or turned into the mountain god) at the age of 1,908.
Another myth given in the same book is regarding the progenitor of the Kim family, Suro (? - 199 AD). He established the Kaya kingdom. His wife whose name was Huh is supposed to have come from Ayodhya in India. It is said that he was born out of an egg wrapped in a golden cloth, which had descended from the heaven.

Another account is about Hyukkuse (BC 57-AD 4), the progenitor of the Park family. He too, was born out of an abnormally big egg, which was found near a well and was reported by the heavenly horse.

There are also some ideas which are totally unknown to another region or country, though they are very popular. For instance, fire was considered as one of the most important and sacred objects throughout the ancient world. In many countries it is used in rituals when oblations were offered, or it is used as a signal of sacrifices and rituals. Many ancient people believed that fire throws diseases and evils away from themselves and from their houses. However, it appears that the fire god himself is seldom worshipped in countries. In the Greek, Egyptian, Chinese and many other mythologies, the sun god was highly worshipped but the fire god was not separately adored. However in Korea, fire is never worshipped. In the oldest Korean mythology Dangun-sinhwa too, which tells about the origin of Korea, there is no reference to the god of fire, though there appear the other nature-gods, such as, wind-god, rain-god and cloud-god. In Korea, fire was considered very important and sacred thing, and people treated it with utmost care because of practical reason. If the original fire (or, fire-seed in Korean concept) was extinguished by a newly married bride even by mistake, it was considered as a serious lapse for which she could even be driven away from her house. In some regions, before the actual entrance to the husband’s house there was a custom for
a bride to cross over fire, which is set in front of the threshold in order to drive the evils away. Among the shamans there were some rituals of setting a fire to remove the evils; or jumping over the fire to overcome unwanted obstacles. Thus, doubtlessly fire was a thing to be cared for and it was considered as a purifier but it was never an object of worship. But in India the fire-god was treated as the most important deity, particularly in the Vedic period. The fire god Agni was not only a worshipped deity but also often a symbol of ritual without which no rite could be performed. Worshipping fire as an important deity seems to be an Indian way of expression of gratitude towards nature. The songs for Agni, together with those of Uṣas, are perhaps the most beautifully ornamented ones amongst the entire Vedic hymns. There is poetic imagination, comparison, and beautiful descriptions to show deep affection and appreciation of the poets towards the fire and the fire-god.

In this way, mythology is similar, and also dissimilar, according to the literature, time, and space. When a god is coming into being, another god is dwindling away. While a god is raised honour, the other god is disgraced. Once a god is elevated, later the same god is degraded, and sometime after, he dwindles to extinction. At one time a god is merely one of the many but at other time he stands at the summit of the gods. A god who once wielded unmatchable power falls down to a ridiculous state. A god, who is greatly worshipped in a certain region, is unknown in other places. Or sometimes, a god with the same nature is worshipped in different regions. The divinities thus undergo variations with the rise and fall of mankind.
Therefore, the present thesis aims to research similarities and dissimilarities of the myths from the point of view of regions, times, literatures and space and to form some different concepts from the conventional ones.

**Methodology followed**

The present work pursues the following method: (i) The relevant Vedic source material, mainly from Rgveda and occasionally from Atharva and Yajurveda are given at the beginning. When needed, extracted reference from Nirukta, Brāhmaṇa and Upaniṣad texts are also referred to. (ii) Then, the Pāli canon, the Mahābhārata and occasionally mythologies of Korea and China follow without any specific order. (iii) As far as possible priority is given to the original texts, not to the secondary literature because the original material itself usually suggests what is the most appropriate pattern to look for and new thoughts are also invariably drawn from the basic and original material. Therefore, avoiding the very well-known facts already dealt with by other scholars, the present work focuses chiefly on new thoughts and on points less dealt with. There is also comparisons with some unknown deities and myths of other regions, particularly, with those of Korea. A special reference is made to mountain deities in a separate chapter.