



The Portrayal of Hindu Mythology in Select Anime: A Critical Overview

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Abstract

Contemporary global pop culture is fascinated by myths from various cultures. This is evident in the numerous references to myths in contemporary global pop culture. We find frequent retellings of myths in cinema, fiction, comics, and so on. Japanese pop culture, especially manga and anime, deserves special mention in this context. Throughout history, manga artists and anime directors have been fascinated by myths, religious scriptures, and esoteric concepts from around the globe, including those of Hinduism. Anime is famous for their multifaceted references to Hindu mythology. Although anime often draws on Hindu mythology, there is a lack of critical studies of its representation. Thus, the proposed study aims to fill this research gap. This paper will analyze the depiction of Hindu mythology in three anime series-*DanMachi*, *High School DxD*, and *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis*-and examine the significance of the Hindu references within their diegetic worlds. The proposed study draws on the tripartite intertextual schema of appropriation-allusion-bricolage and Jolyon Baraka Thomas' concept of "show" as its theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: Anime, Hindu Mythology, Japanese Popular Culture, Retelling of Myths, Anime Studies.

1. Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing a surge in interest in myths. Contemporary global pop culture is fascinated by myths from various cultures. This phenomenon is clearly visible in the numerous references to myths in contemporary global pop culture. We find frequent retellings of myths in cinema, fiction, comics, and so on. For example, Marvel's Avengers movie series draws on Nordic mythology and repackages it for a contemporary audience. In popular fiction, the writings of Rick Riordan (*The Lightning Thief*), Neil Gaiman (*American Gods*), Amish

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Tripathy (*The Immortal of Meluha*), Madeline Miller (*Circe*), et al., deserve mention. East Asia also has its fair share of mythological retellings, as evident in many popular manhua (Chinese comics), webtoons (digital episodic comics read vertically originating in South Korea), manga (Japanese comics), and anime (Japanese animation). Some examples are as follows. Jian He Zheng's manhua *Asura King* situates the journey of the Asuras, ultra-powerful negative beings in Hindu mythology, as a prequel to the Journey to the West story. Yongje Park's webtoon *The God of High School* reimagines Shiva as a female deity, the Master of Third Heavenly Realm. Currygom's webtoon *Kubera* features and reimagines many Hindu deities, including Agni, Akasha, Brahma, Chandra, Gandharva, Garuda, Hanuman, Indra, Kali, Kubera, Marut, Ratri, Shiva, Surya, Varuna, Vayu, Visnu, and Yama. Thus, Hindu mythology is a major source of interest in East Asian pop cultures.

Japanese pop culture, especially manga and anime, deserves special mention in this context. Throughout history, manga artists and anime directors have been fascinated by myths, religious scriptures, and esoteric concepts from around the globe (Thomas, 2012), including those of Hinduism. Manga are famous for their multifaceted references to Hindu mythology. In *Record of Ragnarok*, a manga by Shinya Umemura (writer), Takumi Fukui (writer), and Azychika (illustrator), we find a reimagining of the Hindu pantheon- Shiva, Parvati, Durga, Kali, Ganesha, Rudra, Vishnu, Indra, and so on. Yuzo Takada, in his manga *3x3 Eyes*, reenvisions Goddess Parvati as Pai Ayanokoji, a young girl. He also features Kali in the manga, who is depicted as Pai's alter ego. In *Tokyo Crazy Paradise*, a manga by Yoshiki Nakamura, Maa Durga is portrayed as a heroic warrior goddess. Yana Tobo's manga *Black Butler* features characters named Agni and Soma. In the manga, Agni is reimagined as a butler with powerful abilities. Soma is depicted as the teen prince of Bengal. Agni also appears in Tatsuki Fujimoto's manga *Fire Punch*, where he is the protagonist with strong regenerative abilities. In Kazue Kato's manga *Blue Exorcist*, we find Indra. Here, he is depicted as a four-armed humanoid. Kiyomi Koizumi's *Bhagavat Crease* refers to Kali Yuga and Lord Shiva against the backdrop of cricket. Masami Kurumada, in the manga *Saint Seiya*, reimagines Krishna as the general of the Poseidon army. In Atsushi Ohkubo's *Soul Eater*, Asura is portrayed as a Kishin, an immensely powerful soul eater capable of massive destruction. Ketu, an Asura and a planet in Hinduism, is reenvisioned as Keito, a female police officer in Naotsugu Matsueda's *Persona: Tsumi to Batsu*.

Like manga, many anime feature Hindu mythology frequently. In *Earth Maiden Arjuna*, Arjuna from The Mahabharata is reimagined as an adolescent girl named Juna Ariyoshi. The anime *Fate/Apocrypha* features Karna. In MAPPA's *Jujutsu Kaisen*, the cryptic hand signs are inspired by Mudras in Tantra and Yoga. *Tenkū Senki Shurato* appropriates Hindu deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Lakshmi, and so on. In this anime, Shiva and Vishnu are reimagined as rivals. *DanMachi*, *High School DxD*, and *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis*-the primary texts selected for this study-also feature several deities and concepts from Hindu mythology. The following are brief summaries of the three anime series.

DanMachi, the first primary text selected for this study, is an action-adventure type anime series. The anime centers around Bell Cranel, a 14-year-old adventurer. Bell aspires to be as strong as his crush, Ais Wallenstein. The story takes place in a fictional city called Orario. The anime features deities who incarnate in the mortal world and form guild-like groups of adventurers known as Familias. Every Familia has adventurers who go for various quests, mainly in dungeons. Each Familia is named after a deity, such as Hestia Familia, Rudra Familia, Soma Familia, Ganesha Familia, Hephaestus Familia, etc. Bell is from the Hestia Familia. His ally, Lili, was initially from the Soma Familia but later joined the Hestia Familia. There is constant competition among the different Familias- sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. There have been some violent fights between certain Familias, as seen in the case between the Rudra Familia and the Astraea Familia, where the former schemed to kill the latter.

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The ensuing battle between these two Familias resulted in the killings of every member belonging to them, except Ryu Lion and Jura Halmer, by a juggernaut. The anime depicts Bell's growth after joining the Hestia Familia. He makes several friends, including Lili and Welf Crozzo, and grows stronger after each adventure in the dungeon. There are other important characters also, such as Shakti Varma and Soma.

High School DxD, the second primary text, is an anime series produced by TNK and Passione. The anime follows the story of Issei Hyōdō, Rias Gremory, and their friends-Asia Argento, Akeno Himejima, Yūto Kiba, and Koneko Tōjō. In Season 1, Issei is introduced as a high school teenager studying at Kuō Academy. However, after being killed by Raynare, a fallen angel, he was revived as a devil by Rias Gremory, a pure-blood devil belonging to the Gremory household. Issei becomes Rias' servant. He learns about supernatural beings such as devils, angels, fallen angels, and dragons. Issei also comes to know that he possesses Boosted Gear, a type of Sacred Gear. Sacred Gears are powerful magical items that significantly increase the power of the wielder and give them superhuman abilities. In Season 2, Issei grows stronger as he faces powerful rivals. In Season 3, Issei's friend Genshirō Saji faces Loki. He uses his Vritra-type Sacred Gear to fight Loki. In Season 4, Issei, Saji, and their allies go to Kyoto to rescue Yasaka, the Nine-Tailed Fox yōkai, from the Hero Faction. The Hero Faction is a group of humans, led by Cao Cao, whose motto is to dominate angels, fallen angels, demons, and any other supernatural beings. Saji uses his Vritra-type Sacred Gear to contain Yasaka, now going berserk thanks to the Hero Faction, from destroying Kyoto. Finally, they become successful in rescuing Yasaka. The season ends with Issei's declaration of his love for Rias and the introduction of a boisterous Indra.

Rage of Bahamut, the third primary text, is an anime series produced by MAPPA. The story is set in Mistarcia. It is a magical land inhabited by gods, demons, and humans. Via flashback, it is disclosed that 2000 years ago, the world was on the brink of destruction at the hands of Bahamut, an enormous, ultra-powerful demon beast. The humans, gods, and demons joined hands to seal Bahamut. They became successful, and Bahamut was sealed into two keys. One of these two keys, the God Key, was given to the gods; the other, the Demon Key, to the demons. Now, two thousand years later, a girl named Amira suddenly appears in Mistarcia. She has the God Key and is searching for her mother. She meets Favaro Leone and Kaisar Lidfard, who assist her in finding her mother. However, later in the story, it is revealed that she was created by a demon named Belzebuth. He used his and an angel Nina's essence to create Amira. Belzebuth uses the Demon Key and Amira's God Key to revive Bahamut. Various gods, including Shiva, as well as angels, humans, and demons, again joined hands to fight Bahamut. Finally, it was sealed thanks to Favaro's strike and Amira's self-sacrifice.

Although anime often draw on Hindu mythology, there is a lack of critical studies on its representation in anime. Most studies on anime are generally geared toward issues such as production (Lamarre, 2009), gender (Saito, 2014), reception studies (Matsuura & Okabe, 2014), history (Clements, 2023), politics (Napier, 2005), etc. Though studies on the representation of myths in anime are available, they are mostly centered on Greek mythology (Bryce, 2012), Japanese mythology (Okuyama, 2015), and Christian mythology (Barkman, 2010). Though some studies (Levi, 2000; Chandler, 2025) briefly mention Hindu references in anime, they do not focus specifically on Hinduism. Levi (2012) only mentions that CLAMP's *RG Veda* is based on the Rig Veda, but she does not discuss it elaborately. Chandler (2025) identifies some Hindu allusions in Akira Toriyama's *Dragon Ball* series. But the chapter is focused on Japanese mythology. Thus, the lack of serious academic inquiry into the representation of Hindu mythology in anime warrants a formal academic study. Thus, the proposed study aims to fill this research gap. This paper will analyze the depiction of Hindu mythology in three anime series-*DanMachi*, *High School DxD*, and *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis* and examine the significance of the Hindu references within their diegetic worlds. The

proposed study draws on the tripartite intertextual schema of appropriation-allusion-bricolage (Sanders, 2016; Abrams & Harpham, 2015; Sutherland, 2023) and Jolyon Baraka Thomas' concept of "show" (2012, p. 64) as its theoretical frameworks. The study will also draw on concepts from anime scholars, such as Robin E. Brenner, Maria G. Castello, and Carla Scilabra. This paper argues that Hindu mythological references in these three anime primarily operate through Thomas' (2012) logic of "show," functioning as spectacular narrative devices that enhance world-building and action sequences. The study falls within the domain of Anime Studies.

2. Appropriation of Hindu Myths

Appropriation is the reinterpretation or repackaging of someone else's works, ideas, or concepts and presenting them in a new way. Thus, the previous text, concept, or idea is reframed through this process. According to Julie Sanders, "[...] appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others [...]" (2016, pp. 35-36). Here, a distinction needs to be made regarding appropriation and cultural appropriation in relation to this paper. The study uses the term "appropriation" in a more neutral way and in the literary sense. Here, appropriation is thought of as the general reinterpretation/reimagining of other texts, myths, ideas, or concepts, based on the "interpolation" aspect mentioned by Sanders (2016, p. 35). It is used in a more literary sense rather than an ideological one. Cultural appropriation, on the other hand, is more ideological and associated with postcolonial critique of Western Orientalist practices, where the West parodies or 'steals' (Drabble & Stringer, 2007) elements from African and other non-White cultures. However, this study is not postcolonial in nature or ideologically inspired. This is a more traditional literary-criticism-based study that deliberately seeks to break away from Western or South Asian Humanities' politically charged research.

Examples of appropriation in pop culture include Shiva from Nagabe's manga *The Girl From the Other Side: Siūil, a Rūn* and Agni from Kiyoshi Matsuda's anime *Campfire Cooking in Another World with My Absurd Skill*. In the former, Shiva is reimagined as a young girl, whereas in the latter, Agni is depicted as a short-tempered goddess who loves beer. Both portrayals differ from the original depictions of the respective deities in Hinduism, which typically depict them as males. In the primary texts selected for this study, we find the following appropriations from Hindu mythology: Rudra and Vritra.

2.1 Rudra

2.1.1 Rudra in the Rig Veda

Rudra is the Vedic storm god. In the Rig Veda, he is eulogized as strong, bounteous, wise, and gracious (Rigveda, I.43.1, II.33.7). He is the Rig Vedic god of hymns, balmy medicines, and sacrifice (Rigveda, I.43.4). Rudra is addressed as the god of heroes in the Rig Veda (Rigveda, I.114.2). He is a glorious god in the Rig Veda (Rigveda, I.129.3). He is the "mightiest of the mighty" (Rigveda, II.33.3).

2.1.2 Rudra in *DanMachi*

However, in *DanMachi*, Rudra is represented in a dissimilar light (Shirane, 2023a). His Familia, the Rudra Familia, was a part of Evilus, a violent group of radical Familias who threatened Orario. The Rudra Familia is indirectly responsible for the deaths of the Astraea Familia members. The ensuing battle between these two Familias resulted in the killings of every member belonging to them, except Ryuu Lion and Jura Halmer, by a juggernaut. Thus,

the anime appropriates the Rig Vedic god Rudra. The appropriation lies in the reimagining of this Vedic deity.

2.1.2 Connection with Mikkyō and the Destruction Motif in Hinduism

However, to understand the reason for this appropriation, a possible explanation is provided based on background information- Rudra's connection to Īśāna in Mikkyō. In Japan, Tibetan Buddhism is practiced as Mikkyō or Japanese Esoteric Buddhism (Abe, 2000). It has an immense impact on Japanese culture, including anime (Okuyama, 2015). In Mikkyō, Īśāna is identified with Maheśvara, and Maheśvara is identified with Rudra (Chaudhuri, 2003). Thus, Īśāna and Rudra are the same in Mikkyō (Chaudhuri, 2003). When Īśāna gets angry, it results in negative consequences. As Chaudhuri writes, "*Jū-ni-ten-hō-on-kyō* says that when Īśāna is happy, all gods are happy. The evil spirits remain peaceful. But when he is angry, the evil spirits appear and devastate the country." (2003, p. 129). Thus, there is an element of destruction associated with this deity. Even in Hinduism, Rudra is a very fierce deity (Rigveda, II. 33. 11). It is possible that the anime draws inspiration from Rudra's violent aspect in both Mikkyō and Hindu mythology. However, before passing comments, a look into the narrative's diegetic flow is needed. We need to contextualize and situate Rudra's appropriation within the anime's broader storyline structure. The following subsections elaborate on this issue.

2.1.3 The Appropriation of Rudra and Its Importance in the Plot of *DanMachi*

The importance of Rudra's appropriation in the anime lies mainly in designing the character arc of Ryuu Lion. Lion was a member of the Astraea Familia. The Rudra Familia had an enmity with the Astraea Familia. They had frequent fights. The culmination of the enmity resulted in the summoning of a juggernaut in a dungeon that killed off most members of the two Familias, except Lion and Halmer (Shirane, 2023a). After this incident, Lion decided to avenge her deceased friends. She took out everyone associated with the Rudra Familia and Evilus. Her character arc comes full circle when she destroys the juggernaut who killed off her friends (Shirane, 2023b). She finally avenges her friends and also comes to terms with her traumatic past. Thus, to recap, Rudra Familia's fight with the Astraea Familia summoned the juggernaut that killed all members of both Familias, except Lion and Halmer. This traumatic experience triggered Lion to avenge her murdered comrades. She kills everyone associated with the Rudra Familia and finally defeats the juggernaut. A whole season, Season 4, of the anime is dedicated to her character arc. Thus, Rudra's appropriation as a violent god indirectly responsible for the deaths of the Astraea Familia members was crucial for the growth of Lion's character. She is heightened to an avenger serving justice. This avenging arc is a reference to her Familia's goddess, Astraea. Astraea is the Greek goddess of justice (Avery, 1962b). Lion represents this justice aspect of her Familia's goddess by avenging the wrongful killings of her friends.

2.1.4 Rudra in *DanMachi*: Appropriation, Not Cultural Appropriation

On the surface, it might seem that Rudra in *DanMachi* is an instance of cultural appropriation. However, we need to take into account the "religion as repertoire" aspect of anime. Religions in Japan are considered a database from which anime directors and manga artists have freely chosen elements they mould into their favorite shapes. It is, as Thomas observes, not iconoclastic but "iconoplastic" (2012, p. 15). The irreverence is due to "storehouse" (Thomas, 2012, p. 14) concept applicable to Japanese producers, directors, or writers. When Japanese media outlets borrow elements from the "storehouse of religious concepts," while forging a new cultural product, the creators involved (director or writer) filter the religious information to suit their narrative purposes- "[...] they may liberally pick and mix images, concepts, and vocabulary from a variety of religious. The resulting products may be irreverent, but they are

rarely iconoclastic.” (Thomas, 2012, p. 15). Regarding this religious repertoire or database, Richey writes:

This concept of “religion as repertoire” describes not only how Japanese religious culture traditionally has functioned, but also how the contemporary popular-culture phenomena of *manga* and *anime* function in relation to Japan’s extensive and heterogeneous repertoire of texts, images, artifacts, historical figures, and structures, as well as how Japanese religious culture and *manga/anime* relate to each other as repertoires.

The dissimilar representation of Rudra also stems from *DanMachi* being an “aesthetic product.” Aesthetic products, as Thomas (2012) observes, are anime and manga that use religious imagery and myths to enhance narrative appeal without paying much heed to scripture-specific faithfulness. This mode of using religious elements for cosmetic purposes is what Thomas terms “show” (2012, p. 58). Such products often make irreverent or playful use of religion and myths. That is why Rudra in *DanMachi* is different from the Rudra of the Rig Veda.

However, the directors and writers of anime find it problematic to obliterate the powerful themes, myths, and imagery associated with religions (Thomas, 2012). That is why Rudra is very powerful in *DanMachi*, like his Rig Vedic counterpart. He is a god with divine powers. Also, the different depiction of Rudra is not due to any xenophobic attitude or othering of non-Japanese gods, since Ganesha and Hestia (and most other Non-Japanese gods) are portrayed in a very positive and heroic manner. In the anime, Ganesha is a very helpful and benevolent character. Hestia is a heroic goddess who cares deeply for her Familia. Thus, it is a literary appropriation and not a cultural appropriation.

2.2 Vritra

2.2.1 Vritra in the Rig Veda

In the Rig Veda, Vritra is a Dragon-type titanic monster. He blocked the rivers’ courses and obstructed the flow of all waters (Rigveda, I.52.6, I.54.10). Indra slew him and freed the waters (Rigveda, I.32.1). Thus, he is Indra’s enemy. Vritra is depicted as an obstructor (Rigveda, IV.16.7) and enveloper (Rigveda, II.11.5) as he hindered the flow of the waters.

2.2.2 Vritra in *High School DxD*

In *High School DxD*, Vritra is reimagined as Genshirō Saji’s Sacred Gear (Yoshioka, 2015). Sacred Gears are powerful magical items that significantly increase the power of the wielder and give them superhuman abilities. In Season 3, Issei’s friend Saji faces Loki, who is on a rampage of destruction (Yoshioka, 2015). He uses his Vritra-type Sacred Gear to stop Loki. In Season 4, Saji uses his Vritra-type Sacred Gear to contain the hypnotized Yasaka, a fox yōkai, from going berserk (Takahashi, 2018). The difference from the original Rig Vedic depiction of Vritra is that here, he is depicted in a positive role. Here, he is not obstructing any water bodies but hindering the evil plans of Loki and the Hero Faction. He is helping Saji to fight Loki and rescue Yasaka.

2.2.3 The Importance of Vritra’s Appropriation

To understand the reason behind his reimagination, a look into the plot of *High School DxD* is necessary. In the anime, Vritra is sealed in Saji’s Sacred Gear. Thus, he becomes nonchalant

to the world as he does not have his original physical body and is bound to the wearer's Sacred Gear. He is no longer evil because he cannot do anything on his own; he has no physical body. He becomes nonchalant and decides to help Saji. His role as an obstructor is referred to when he obstructs Loki's and the Hero Faction's plans. In the Rig Veda, Vritra is depicted as a negative obstructor, one who envelops the waters. In the anime, Vritra is a positive obstructor, the one who obstructed Cao Cao's plans by enveloping Yasaka. Thus, he becomes an anchor point in the plot as he helps Saji to hinder Cao Cao's plans.

3. Allusions to Hindu Mythology

Allusion is an implicit reference to another text, character, or cultural phenomenon. According to Abrams and Harpham, "Allusion is a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage...Most allusions serve to illustrate or expand upon or enhance a subject [...]" (2015, p. 11). An example of an allusion would be the reference to pishachas in Indranil Ghoshal's manga *Moksha*. Here, they are treated as demonic entities similar to their depiction in Hinduism. In the primary texts, we find the following allusions to Hinduism: Soma, Shakti, Asura, and Indra.

3.3 Soma

3.3.1 Soma in the Rig Veda

In the Rig Veda, Soma is a kind of divine wine or nectar. It can grant immortality to the drinker (Rigveda, XI.106.8). Soma is also the personification of the moon (Rigveda, X.85.5). As a drink, Soma is Indra's favorite drink. As a god, Soma is Indra's ally. Soma also has an intoxicating effect on the drinker (Rigveda, IX.1.10).

3.3.2 Soma in *DanMachi*

In *DanMachi*, the intoxication and moon god aspects of Soma are alluded to. In the anime, Soma is depicted as a deity who prepares wine and presides over the Soma Familia (Shirane, 2019). His wine is intoxicating. Also, the insignia of the Soma Familia shows a chalice with a half-moon (Hisao, 2015).

3.3.3 Importance of the Allusion to Soma

The allusion to Soma in *DanMachi* primarily contributes to Lili's character growth. Lili was initially a member of the Soma Familia. But she later decided to leave the Familia. Soma is a god who judges his Familia members by testing their ability to resist the allure of his Soma wine. He trusted only those who could resist his wine. It was his method of testing his disciples. Lili was the only one who did not succumb to the allure of his wine (Shirane, 2019). It gave Lili a huge moral boost.

3.4 Shakti

3.4.1 Concept of Shakti in Hinduism

Shakti is the all-powerful feminine energy that creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. She is the dynamic or active component of Shiva or of Brahman. Shakti is the supreme deity in Shaktism, one of the prominent denominations of Hinduism. Depending on the sect or the seeker, Shakti can be visualized as "[...] a male god's consort (his active and immanent power), or as the ultimately independent, female absolute-the Goddess or Devi [...]" (Johnson, 2010,

p. 280). In Shaktism, the latter form is adopted. In modern times, Shakti and Her different emanations, such as Kaali and Chandi, are sometimes associated with women's empowerment (Reid-Bowen, 2008).

3.4.1 Allusion to Shakti in the Character of Shakti Varma and Its Importance

In *DanMachi*, there is a character called Shakti Varma (Hisao, 2020a). Her character has several allusions to Shakti or Devi. Like the Hindu Devis, she is shown as strong and powerful. Her firmness and determination are highlighted. She is a leader who acts in accordance with the situation (Hisao, 2020b). Her fearlessness and bravery are noteworthy. The allusion to Shakti or Devi in the character of Shakti Varma highlights her as a strong, powerful woman.

3.5 Asura

3.5.1 Asura in Hinduism

Asuras are malevolent and ultra-powerful negative beings in Hindu mythology. They are extremely powerful. In post-Vedic literature, Asuras are frequently depicted as the enemies of the Devas (Johnson, 2010). Regarding their difference, Johnson observes, "[...] the difference between them is that the asuras, unlike the devas, do not accept sacrificial offerings and consequently they provide no assistance to human beings" (2010, p. 34). Asuras are often associated with destruction and violence. Some Asuras have multiple arms, such as Banasura, who is believed to have a thousand arms (Vanamali, 2000).

3.5.2 Allusion to Asura in *High School DxD* and Its Significance

In *High School DxD* Season 4, Kiba refers to Cao Cao as an Asura (Takahashi, 2018). The reason behind this epithet is due to Cao Cao's multi-armed form and immense power. Kiba and his allies found it very difficult to defeat Cao Cao in his multi-armed form. He was causing havoc in Kyoto in that form. That is why Kiba calls him an Asura. The allusion to Asura in Cao Cao's character highlights his power and strength. This heightens the action and tension in the fights.

3.6 Indra

3.6.1 Indra in the Rig Veda

Indra is the Rig Vedic god of thunder. He is the most powerful god in the Rig Veda. Almost one-fourth of the Rig Vedic hymns are dedicated to him. He slew Vritra, the demon obstructing the flow of waters. Indra is also a very confident and boisterous god (Ludwig, 2001). However, in post-Vedic literature, Indra's importance as a god diminished significantly (Johnson, 2010). His depiction began to show signs of arrogance and vanity (Krishnan, 2019).

3.6.2 Indra in *High School DxD* and the Significance of This Allusion

The post-Vedic depiction of Indra is alluded to in the last episode of Season 4 of *High School DxD* (Konuta, 2018). Indra is introduced in this episode. He is shown talking to Azazel in an overconfident manner. He is wearing an aloha shirt and behaving in a very casual manner, as if he can control everything. In the anime, he has an element of boisterousness and flashiness, an allusion to his Hindu counterpart. As the anime is unfinished, Indra's role is only shown as a powerful god, and that too in the last episode of Season 4 (Konuta, 2018). However, his namesake is an allusion to the Hindu god of thunder, Indra. Like Indra, he is boisterous and

arrogant. His appearance in the last episode hints at his future role as a major character in the upcoming season, if it is confirmed.

4. Bricolage from Various Myths

Bricolage is the creation of a new artifact or text via borrowing and pasting together elements from a wide variety of cultural phenomena. According to John Sutherland, bricolage is a “[...] work that is put together from whatever materials come to hand” (2023, 108). Chris Baldick defines bricolage as “[...] the practice of transforming ‘found’ materials by incorporating them in new work” (2001, p. 30). In the primary texts, there are two examples of bricolage: Monsterphilia and Bahamut’s awakening.

4.1 Monsterphilia

In *DanMachi*, Season 1, Episode 2, the Ganesha Familia, led by Ganesha, arranges an annual huge festival called Monsterphilia (Shirane, 2015). The festival takes place in the Colosseum. Here, adventurers fight monsters and try to tame them. In this episode, there are references to three elements- Lord Ganesha from Hindu mythology, the Colosseum from Roman history, and Jallikattu from Tamil culture.

In Hinduism, Lord Ganesha is considered the remover of obstacles and giver of success (Johnson, 2010). He is depicted with an elephant’s head and tusks. Ganesha is considered a benevolent deity in Hinduism (Singh, 2002). He is also a foodie (Munshi, 1958). In *DanMachi*, Ganesha is depicted with an elephantine mask and tusks. Ganesha is also benevolent. His helpful nature is showcased in Season 2, Episode 11, when he helps Hestia and commoners during times of crisis (Akinaga, 2019). He is also quite fond of food. These are allusions to his Hindu counterpart.

The Colosseum is a huge amphitheater in Rome, Italy. It is the largest amphitheater built during the Roman Empire. It was used to display gladiator fights, animal hunts, dramas, re-enactments of legendary battles, and other events (Claridge, 1998). In *DanMachi*, Season 1, Episode 2, the Colosseum is shown, where adventurers will fight monsters and try to tame them (Shirane, 2015). The issue of taming monsters is a reference to Jallikattu. It is a bull-taming event in Tamil tradition. Participants try to hold onto the hump of a bull as it runs through an arena. In *DanMachi*, Season 1, Episode 2, this bull-taming festival is alluded to when the adventurers try to tame monsters inside the Colosseum.

These three elements-Lord Ganesha from Hindu mythology, the Colosseum from Roman history, and Jallikattu from Tamil culture-thereby create a hybrid imagery. The anime has drawn on three sources and created a new cultural product. Thus, it is a bricolage.

4.1.1 The Importance of the Monsterphilia Bricolage

The main significance of the Monsterphilia bricolage is in the formation of striking visual sequences and action scenes. The director’s motivation was to create a grand setting, and he achieved this by improvising whatever he had at hand-in this case, elements from Hinduism, Roman history, and Tamil culture. Another issue is to give a tribute to Lord Ganesha. The director designed this grand imagery to introduce Ganesha.

4.2 Bahamut's Awakening

In Islamic cosmology, Bahamut is a monster that supports the Earth (Lane, 1883). Jorge Luis Borges thinks of it as a Behemoth so immense that humans cannot bear its sight (Borges & Guerrero, 2005). In *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis*, the Bahamut is reimagined as a giant dragon capable of destroying the world (Hasegawa, 2014). In Episodes 11-12 of the anime, various beings-deities, angels, and demons- from various pantheons gather together to fight Bahamut. Among them are Shiva from Hinduism, Poseidon from Greek mythology, Isis from Egyptian mythology, Gabriel and Azazel from Christianity, and so on (Akahoshi, 2014; Hasegawa, 2014). Thus, so many beings are depicted in a singular fight, thereby creating a bricolage.

4.2.1 Importance of the Bahamut's Awakening Bricolage

Bahamut's Awakening marks the climax of *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis*. In order to stop him, the gods, demons, angels, and humans joined hands. The purpose of the bricolage was to create a plot avenue to unite every being, irrespective of their nature. Another reason was to highlight Bahamut's power. The fact that Shiva, an omnipotent god, had to fight alongside Odin and others showcases that Bahamut is a universal threat. This creates tension and thrills in the plot.

5. Importance of Hindu Myths in the Anime

5.1 Designing Story Arcs and Plot Avenues

The references to Hindu myths help the anime directors design story arcs and plot avenues. For example, the appropriation of Vritra as a positive obstructor in *High School DxD* Seasons 3-4 significantly shapes the events in the Underworld and Kyoto, respectively. In Season 3, Saji's Vritra Sacred Gear helped him immensely while fighting Loki (Yoshioka, 2015). Again, in Season 4, Vritra helped Saji and Issei to rescue Yasaka (Takahashi, 2018). Without Vritra as a reference, the anime would have been quite different and may not have achieved the spark of the fights. It would have suffered from loopholes in the plot. In Episode 11 of *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis*, Shiva and several other mighty gods are shown who are ready to fight Bahamut in Bahamut's Awakening bricolage (Akahoshi, 2014). Here, the reference to Shiva, the almighty god of destruction in Hinduism, heightens the danger aspect of Bahamut, as an omnipotent god tries to stop Bahamut from destroying the world. Thus, it creates suspense and increases the audience's interest.

5.2 Highlighting Specific Traits of a Character

References to Hindu mythology also function to highlight particular traits of an anime character. Regarding the importance of naming in anime and manga, Brenner says, "[...] names often function as symbols. Names are powerful indicators of a character's intended role or personality [...]" (2007, p. 58). Likewise, Ganesha from *DanMachi*, a benevolent helper, is an allusion to his Hindu counterpart. Vritra from *High School DxD* is an obstructor, like his Rig Vedic counterpart, in the sense that he obstructs Loki's and the Hero Faction's destructive plans. In the same anime, Indra is a confident and boisterous god, much like his original depiction in Hinduism.

5.3 Creating Visual Marvels and Action Sequences

Another function of Hindu references is to create marvelous imagery and action sequences in the anime. For example, the Monsterphilia bricolage in *DanMachi* is marked by amazing fights.

In *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis*, Shiva's endeavor to stop Bahamut is full of striking imagery. Vritra's fights with Loki and Yasaka bring in splendid action sequences in *High School DxD*.

6. Entertaining the Masses, Not Moralizing: Decoding "Show"

6.1 South Asian and Western Fiction's Retellings of Myths vs Anime's Retellings of Myths

Regarding the re-envisioning of myths, an important difference between anime and South Asian fiction and Western fiction is the outlook. South Asian and Western fiction reimagine myths often with an ideological angle (Budkuley, 2010). For example, Kavita Kané's *Lanka's Princess* is a feminist retelling of the *Ramayana*. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* is likewise a feminist retelling of the *Mahabharata*. However, anime tries to avoid overt political underpinnings in the reimagination of myths. In *High School DxD*, for example, references to deities such as Indra, Odin, and Loki are not intended as a feminist or postcolonial retelling. They serve to enhance the entertainment value of the storylines, not to advance any social justice agenda. Regarding this issue, Berndt observes that manga and anime "[...] show a strong inclination to refrain from explicit sociopolitical representation in favour of fantastic settings and unpredictable narrative outcomes" (2024, pp. 3-4). Cascatello and Scilabra say, "[...] myth, its use (and abuse) and its alteration depend on the anime genre and on the plot" (2015, p. 193). It needs to be highlighted that religion in Japan is treated as a repertoire, a database, from which each artist/litterateur freely picks elements and then mixes, matches, or reinterprets them (Richey, 2018). That is why even a single anime like *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis* features so many religious and mythological elements. *DanMachi* also borrows the Hindu deity Ganesha to create the striking visual bricolage of the Monsterphilia festival. *High School DxD* mobilizes Vritra to create elaborate action sequences. The retelling of Hindu myths in the primary texts, thus, lacks any ideological impetus. As already discussed, they increase the allure of the plot.

Another issue is that in Western popular fiction, such as *The Lightning Thief*, the mythic and godly aspects are given a central role. But in the selected anime, the deities are not always the center of attraction. They are given their proper screen time, but they form a block among other blocks (humans, demons, angels, etc.) of the anime.

6.2 "Show" as the Mode of Mythological Retellings in Anime

This issue of religion as a repertoire in anime concerns a concept Jolyon Baraka Thomas terms "show" (2012). Thomas defines "show" as the use of religious and mythological elements in anime and manga cosmetically to enhance the appeal of storylines. He observes that most anime use religious/mythological imagery and elements to entertain audiences, not to propagate moral teachings (Thomas, 2012). The primary texts in this study also follow the "show" model of using religious/mythological elements. Ganesha in *DanMachi*, Indra in *High School DxD*, and Shiva in *Rage of Bahamut: Genesis* are neither depicted to provoke religious fervor in the audience nor intended to represent any sociopolitical issues. Their role in the anime is to provide anchor points in the plot, highlight specific character traits, and create marvelous visual sequences. The selected anime are commercial products aimed at a young audience, intended to entertain and not to propagate any ideological or political agenda.

Conclusion

Hindu mythology is a significant area of interest in East Asian popular culture, as evidenced by numerous manga and anime featuring Hindu deities. In the primary texts, references to Hinduism follow a tripartite pattern: appropriation, allusion, and bricolage. Appropriation is

evident when a character is significantly altered from their original depiction, as in the cases of Rudra and Vritra. Allusion is evident when there is an implicit similarity to their original depiction, as in the cases of Soma, Shakti, Asura, and Indra. Bricolage is evident in the combination of various mythical and cultural elements to create hybrid imagery, as in *Monsterphilia* and the awakening of Bahamut. It has been found that the references to Hindu mythology help anime directors design story arcs, highlight specific character traits, create striking visuals, and build elaborate action sequences. The philosophical or theological underpinnings of the source traditions are sometimes inverted, sometimes alluded to, and sometimes mixed with other traditions. Also, unlike the retelling of myths in most South Asian and Western fiction, the selected anime does not harbor any overt ideological underpinnings. They have mobilized Hindu mythological elements to enhance the storylines' appeal and entertain the audience. The depiction of Hindu myths does not perpetuate Orientalist cultural appropriation, as Hindu deities such as Ganesha, Shiva, and Shakti are portrayed positively and close to their original depiction. Another issue is that, unlike Western popular fiction, the deities in the selected anime are not always the main focus. They are positioned as major characters but within the framework of a multi-character setup.

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