

## **National Seminar on 'Rethinking Myth in Folk Dramatic Forms' (14-15 June, 2016)**

### **Concept Note**

Questions about the nature and functions of myth in diverse cultural contexts have been raised and discussed by scholars from varying disciplines like anthropology, religious studies, folkloristics, history of literature, philosophy and psychology. The very concept of myth seems to change radically from camp to camp. Specialists talk about cult-myths and ritual-myths. Folklorists foreground the entertainment value of myths and their diffusion across space and time, historians and critics of literature emphasize their literary quality and philosophers seek their truth-value. Scholars like Richard Chase, A. B. Rooth, A. E. Jensen, Jane Ellen Harrison, Kluckhohn and B. Malinowski have their own interpretations of myth depending on their field of work and discipline. Myth is a genre of its own with defined qualities and functions and can be studied from plural cultural and religious perspectives.

There is no doubt that myth is a vital ingredient of human civilization and an important cultural force. Myths have ever been powerful tools in managing societies and have helped naturalize 34 social orders which could otherwise have been seen as unnatural and even unjust. The seminar is meant to show how deeply the sacred tradition of myth intervenes in human pursuits and how strongly it controls their moral and social behaviour.

India is a country that is rich in myths, some pan-Indian and many regional and local. They serve as a storehouse of wisdom and lend themselves to any number of readings, reinterpretations and rewritings. Artists constantly go back to myths and explore their semantic and aesthetic potential to articulate their world views and critique society. While this has happened in fiction, poetry, theatre and several other forms of art, this seminar concentrates on the interpretation of myth in folk dramatic forms and their performance in varying cultural contexts asking them questions like how and why they are doing it and what function does the myth serve in specific social and cultural contexts: in other words, the politics of the employment and interpretation of myth in folk-performances. Several popular myths have been subverted, distorted and manipulated in order to serve the interests of hegemonic social groups from time to time. As a consequence, many myths have lost their original meaning, mooring and intent and often come to signify the very opposite. Constant misuse and what M N Srinivas would call 'Sanskritisation' has made many of them completely unrecognizable and far removed from their original forms and functions. The purpose of the seminar was to look at the nature and functions of myth in specific cultures, societies and historical contexts such as inversions and transformations and uncover the underlying tactics of assimilation and subversion. With this view myth scholars, folklore specialists, anthropologists, theatre activists and performers from different parts of the country were invited to discuss a debate the social, cultural and political implications of myth-creation, myth-transformation and myth-manipulation.

Points for discussion:

General:

- What is myth?
- What are the social functions of myth?
- How and why is myth used in folk performances?
- What happens to a myth in such performances? How do its role and function change?

Specific:

- Myths in specific folklore performances in various regions of India, South, East, West, North and North-East.
- How is a specific myth interpreted in a specific cultural and class context?
- What does it do to the understanding of society?
- How does it help social regulation and misrecognition?
- Whose interest does the particular interpretation serve?

A National seminar on 'Rethinking Myth in Folk Dramatic Forms' was organized during 14-15 June 2016 at IAS. Professor A. Achuthan, Fellow, IAS was the Convener of the seminar. The welcome address was given by Professor Chetan Singh, Director, IAS. Professor A. Achuthan, Convener of the seminar gave introductory remarks. Keynote was given by Professor N. Bhakthavathsala Reddy, Director, Institute for Indian Folklore, Trivandrum.

#### PARTICIPANTS

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