

OCCIDENT AND THE ORIENT: GODS, MYTHS AND CONVERSATIONS

Abhirup Sarkar and Anupama Nayar*

Abstract: The term 'indigenous', since late 20th century, is being extensively used to denote people and literatures, in addition to its previous function of classifying flora and fauna. These people, under international and national legislations are referred as, culturally distinct groups, affected by colonization. The paper raises a query against the categorization of a community and literatures as 'indigenous', on the basis of a comparative and descriptive study of myths, historical belief systems, gods and their language systems, partially based on the idea of the structural study of myths (mythemes) as well as, on the notion of a common psyche. For a long span of time, the West hardly knew about East Asian islands (During their stay in Korea from 1653 until 1666 the Dutch came into a stable and well-organized country ~ The journal of Hamel and Korea), thus the two worlds developed without having much contact or knowledge about each other, even when the West and major regions of the East (including Central Asia, Malay islands, and later, Japan) were trading. It can be observed, even when these islands were untouched by the Western world, (only majorly influenced by the Chinese and the Japanese cultures) huge number of gods, belief systems and myths are identical to just be called a coincidence. This resemblance in the historical, socio-cultural, mythical and mystical notions of the two different sides of the world with considerable difference in their geographical occupancy, impels a much deeper and detailed study to understand the development of psyche of the human civilization through the ages and thus assist in discarding the categorizations. Thus, on the basis of the identicalities, the paper attempts to discard the categorization of the Asian culture and literature of the far Eastern islands as indigenous, and provided a level platform alongside Western literature.

Introduction

“REKKR – Men, who are warriors in the sense of their courage, bravery, deeds and feats, rather than just warriors by occupation.” ~ Norse Culture

“JEONSA – Men who are brave, champions, warriors on the battlefields, charismatic and a lot more than just heroes by occupation.” ~ Korean Culture

The time when the Norse culture was spreading like wildfire in the west, there were huge shifts happening here in the east as well. When the earliest Runes were being written (3rd Cen.), around the same time, one of the major countries in the eastern

* Dr ANUPAMA NAYAR, Professor, Department of English CHRIST (deemed to be University), Bengaluru. Dr. ABHIRUP SARKAR, English Literature and Communication Studies, CHRIST (deemed to be University), Bengaluru.
Email: abhirup.sarkar@eng.christuniversity.in.

hemisphere of the world was undergoing a massive shift, by forming alliance with China. That is, Silla, for the first time under the Tang dynasty, unified its peninsula with the Chinese. The script used by Silla at that time was majorly Chinese script. The myths and gods, people of Silla believed in were also partly influenced by the Chinese or the Japanese cultures along with their own, unique ones. But at no point were the Silla (Later Goguryo) islands influenced by the Western culture or myths. And yet, on comparing the two sides, we found innumerable identical notions, which concretizes the idea that it is unnecessary to categorize these islandic communities and their literatures as “Indigenous” with a loose ended justification.

The following work provides a comparative research study in an attempt to explain, why it is justified to draw parallels between Eastern and Western communities and literatures, keep both of them on a level platform and thus, discard the categorization of either of those as “Indigenous” or otherwise.

I. Gods

I-1. THE NORSE THEORY OF CREATION

According to the Norse mythology, in the beginning there was infinite space which they called as *Ginnmga-gap* wherein, one confinement was icy and frost while the other was flame and heat. *Muspellsheim* (Home of desolation) melted the ice in *Niflheim* (Home of fog) and icy cold venom flowed in the gap, and from the heat of *Muspellsheim*, emerged the first giant of the planet and the first cow (*Ymir* and *Audhumla*). While from *Ymir*, sprang the other giants, *Audhumla* licked an iceberg which gave birth to Borr, who with Bestla gave birth to, Odin, Vili and Ve, the forebearers of mankind. And thus it was Odin, who furthered the world, and thus becoming the “God of Life and Death”.

I-2. THE KOREAN THEORY OF CREATION

According to the ancient Hangul mythology, Maitreya existed during the formation of Earth, who decided to separate the Earth and the Sky, and thus place the heaven like the handle of the lid of a kettle and set pillars at four corners of Earth, which had two moons and two suns. Maitreya also found the secret to make fire from the MOUSE, who was promised the access to all the rice chests in return. After finding fire, Maitreya stood under the heaven with a GOLDEN tray in one hand and SILVER tray in another praying to the heavens. Five bugs, dropped on the golden and the silver tray. Of these, the bugs from the silver tray became women and the bugs from the golden tray became men. And thus, they were the forebearers of mankind. Thus, it can be clearly seen that the idea of creation on either side, as mentioned, is almost exactly similar, with some minor modifications. It can be observed that apart from the minor modifications, both the creation stories have a clear demarcation between the heaven and the hell, the light and darkness, the warmth and the cold, right from the point where these stories begin. Thus, this is the point which marks the beginning of understanding, how and the where the commonalities lie in these notions, the first one being mentioned above.

II. DRAGONS – OCCIDENT and THE ORIENT

The myths of ‘Dragons in the East’ began with Fuxi 伏羲 (the founder of Chinese civilization) who was said to be half man and half dragon. The Koreans adapted the Dragon from the Chinese myth, but in a much more spiritual and understanding manner. The Dragon in South Korea has been depicted as the king who lives under the sea and is welcoming to fault, is just and faithful. While, on the other hand, the myth of Niohoggr emerged in Norse mythology as that of a *malis* striker. In the Viking era, Nio meant a social stigma. Rather than a forgiving creature, the dragon or ‘Niohoggr’ has been depicted as a Serpent, gnawing at the world tree or horrifying monster chewing on corpses of inhabitants of Nastrond, who used to be guilty of murder, oath breaking et-al.

III. LANGUAGE: FUTHARK: THE NORDIC MOTHER LANGUAGE

III-1. OVERVIEW

The mere notion of being able to read and understand a language (letter) which possibly is magical in nature brought in a huge number of enthusiasts from around the waters to join in and interpret the Runic languages for transcription. But not every transcription was as justifiable as Stephen’s. While conducting an unrestricted interpretation was easy, a uniformed reconstruction strategy has not been agreed upon with every researcher pitching in their own concepts and theories. Further, there have been several instances of incorrect transcription as well as renowned cases of forged ‘historical’ texts and charters.

Thus, amidst this hoard of transcriptions provided by innumerable number of researchers and linguists and historians, the transcriptions by Stephen’s and Worm’s interpretation have been considered to be closest to the exact meaning. And thus, any interpretation from anyone without a legitimate justification is discarded.

III-2. OLD FUTHARK

The Kurylowicz’s 4th law of analogy states that,

When a new form comes into an opposition to an already existing form, the marked (new) form will assume the unmarked functions and the unmarked (old) form will fill in some new ones” ~ John S. Robertson

The above analogy can be used to justify the notion that the Germanic (old) Futhark was derived from Roman letters. Like for instance:

Sir-*ÆNÆHÆ*, Sir-*HÆISLÆ*, The lady-*GINIA*, Raised-this-stone-to-the-lord *FRÆWÆRÆDÆA* (by Stephen) is different from *frawaradaz /anahahaislagina /z* which modern runologists have come to accept. Further, the theory has been successfully able to justify the development of Anglo-Saxon Futhark, wherein the new syllables ‘ae/oe’ were added in the phonetics inventory, as well as two existing phonemes ‘a:/Ø:’.

In a simplified manner:

“FORMUNMARKED ↔ FUNCTIONUNMARKED ⇒ (1) FORMUNMARKED
 ↔FUNCTIONMARKED; (2) FORMMARKED ↔ FUNCTIONUN MARKED.”
 (Where ↔ means ‘corresponds to’, and ⇒ means ‘develops into, splits into’.)

Furthermore, the phonological changes were as follows:

Transforming of /a/ to /æ/ (e.g., *ask > æsc ‘ash’); Monophthongization of /ai/ to /a:/ (e.g., *aik > āc ‘oak’); Umlaut under certain conditions of /o:/ to /œ:/ (e.g., *ōþil > þil ‘homeland’); loss of nasal after /a/ and before another consonant with compensatory vowel-lengthening, nasalization, and rounding, */anC/ > */ā:C/ > */o:C/ > /o:C/ (e.g., *ansuz > aṣ(u)z > *aṣ > ōs ‘god’).

There have been a lot of disputes and mismatches in comparing the Latin and the Germanic writing systems but Williams provides a feasible enough theory that,

“During inconsistencies, Roman letters took a new function not present in the inventory while the Latins filled the existing gap.” ~ Williams

The relationship between the Roman and the Runic forms can be clearly seen in the following:

⟨A⟩ = A /a/, ⟨B⟩ = b /b/, ⟨C⟩ = K /k/, ⟨F⟩ = F /f/, ⟨H⟩ = H /h/, ⟨I⟩ = i /i/, ⟨L⟩ = l /l/,
 ⟨M⟩ = M /m/, ⟨N⟩ = n /n/, ⟨R⟩ = r /r/, ⟨S⟩ = S /s/, ⟨T⟩ = t /t/, ⟨U⟩ = U /u/.

There were major shifts, additions and modifications in the Germanic Futhark, similar to that of the ‘Great Vowel Shift’ in the modern English language. An interesting evidence that Germanic Futhark borrowed the Roman Y to represent /y/ is the words like ‘Nimphis’ used around the birth of Jesus Christ (1980 A.E). That is, the word transformed from: Nimphis (<1980 A.E) to Nymphis (1980 A.E) to Calipso (A.E 1934).

The most interesting shift in the creation of the futhark from the Roman alphabet are X, Y, and Z (including G). These letters have undergone a series of chain of shifts. It is notable that X /ks/, Y /y/ (or /i/), and Z /z/, like Q /k(w)/ and K /k/, are kind of extended, since these last three letters of the alphabet were borrowed from Greek and were used to write Greek names and other Greek contents.

There has also been considerable ambiguity in borrowing the letter X and Y and using them in the words around the time of Birth of Christ which later also appeared alongside K. There were very limited gaps to be filled in the Germanic inventory wherein the ‘Zeta’ (Z) was the last letter to receive a Germanic function, apart from only a few other major functional changes.

III-3. NEW FUTHARK

“The Runic reform throughout Scandinavia was an unconsciously continuous process.” ~ Schulte (2006)

Similar to the disparities found in the transcriptions and the theories regarding the Older Futhark, there have been continuous debates whether or not the newer Futhark was a major drastic jump or a continuous process, and that was the response of one of the researchers.

Following the K-4 analogy, the older Futhark transformed into a newer version of Futhark, the “Younger Futhark”. The development of Younger Futhark was massively influenced by child language acquisition leading to the transformation of /a/ to /a,i,u/ (leading on to the transformation /a, i, e, o, u/ in modern English later).

Concerning Graphemic reductions, from old Futhark to the new Futhark, (e) and (o) were removed from the list and (i) and (u) took over. Similarly, (j, i, e) were replaced by (w, u, y, o, φ) and thus those shifts were continued until the post Nordic or post Viking era to produce the younger Futhark and further the vernacular Germanic languages.

The Runic alphabets were called “Futhark”, named after the first six Runes that were found, namely Fehu, Uruz, Thurisaz, Ansuz, Raidho and Kaunan (similar to aleph-beth). The transformation of Futhark happened from Elder (Germanic) Futhark with 24 characters (1st century) to Younger (Nordic) Futhark with 16 characters (750 CE – Viking Era) to the Anglo-Saxon “FUTHORC” with 33 characters, which was the major version of Futhark carved on wood stones or bones found today. The Futhorc letters ‘supposedly’ held magical powers and thus were of great importance to the Nordics. The Futhorc is considered the origin of the Germanic languages, which is evident from the following excerpt taken from the story of “IMMA” by the Venerable Bede.

In the battle where King Aelfwine was killed, a memorable incident happened which is worth mentioning. There was a youth called Imma one of the king’s thegns, and was struck down, brutally injured. In a matter of time, he gathered himself up and patched his wounds. As he looked around for a friend to be taken care by, he was caught by the men of King Ethelred’s army. On being questioned, he responded that he came to the war to bring provisions. The noble (present among the others there) agreed to that and tended to his wounds. And to prevent his escape, ordered him to be bound at night. But he COULD NOT BE BOUND, for as soon as those who bound him were gone, HIS BONDS WERE LOOSENED.

And thus, it’s said that the bounds of Imma, were inscribed with Runic letters that is, “Futhark”, and held magical powers, unlocking the bounds every time the capturers left. The Runic characters were theorized to say something along the lines of “No innocent shall be held captive in these bounds”. Runes are constantly discovered during excavations of explorations all around the European region, providing even more solid grounds regarding “Futhorc”. Recent Runic findings were in Orkney by Michael P. Barnes (University College London), OR 22 Quoys and OR 23 Naversdale. And thus, it is evident that FUTHORC was being used before the Germanic languages

arrived, and that the Germanic languages must have emerged from Futhorc to the current versions we know them.

IV. HANGUL

IV-1. OVERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, while the western “Futhark” was transforming, Korea was declared an official state after merging with China. Thus, distinct parts of Korea were writing in different scripts as opposed to the Germanic Futhark (courtesy of the Runes), the ancient Koreans did not have any such system to turn to. The only earliest first-hand description we get is that of the Han-Chinese observers who recorded the names of the states and described the people. The earliest description was that of the town and settlement of Choson, and its people who were described by the Chinese as ‘Eastern Barbarian groups’. The three Hans were namely, Puyo, Koguryo, Okcho and Ye. Further, the origin of Koreans has been a hugely ambiguous. Whether to affix the origin of Koreans to the Tungusic family, the Manchu family or the Japanese family, is still a huge debate due to unavailability of any written script from those times (unlike the Runes). Yet, one of the widely accepted theories is the origin from the Altaic and Japanese families.

IV-2. EARLY SCRIPT

It is known that Chinese were writing history and literature 2000 years before even Hangul letters were invented. Thus, no wonder we have such huge volumes of Chinese history and literature and mythologies available even until this day.

Silla, was the first state to take up Chinese as its principle written language. The Chinese had different sets of characters. The adaptations were carried out around 57BC – 935AD. Thus, the huge number of Chinese characters were adapted by the early Koreans to transcribe them into a language of their own. Thus, most of the early Korean scriptures (including the local dialects) were hugely influenced by Chinese as well as a little from Japanese characters as well.

HANGUL. It was in 1446 that King Sejong decided to introduce new and exclusive Korean letters, and completely move away from the Chinese characters. And thus, it was 1449, when King Sejong introduced the script in a handbook and explained its uses, which was found to be brilliant and was slowly universally accepted by the Koreans. The dictionary which was invented in 1447 was called, ‘Tongguk Chounguk’ and by 1480s the Korean script (Hangul) emerged as an independent language.

As Hangul slowly developed, some things became very obvious:

- A. A lot of syllables (including the number system) were borrowed from Chinese system.
- B. The early Hangul that used Chinese characters failed to identify words even after using blocks, which led to the invention of independent Hangul.

- C. The 15th century scripts added a few modifications which were later deemed to be obsolete, once new Hangul was introduced.
- D. While the semantic structure is borrowed from Japanese system, it sounds completely different.
- E. The spellings are written morphophonemically instead of phonemically, which is exactly opposite to Futhorc, which is majorly written phonemically.

Thus, to sum up, what the South Koreans refer to as the Hangul and the North Koreans refer to as the Choson Mal, the Korean language is a genius invention by King Sejong back in the 15th century, which later developed to become the independent language of Korea, believed to have been derived from the names of the places, and the 25 poems known as ‘Hyangga’ which was composed in the 10th Century, portraying the language of Silla, and slowly turning into the Vernacular Hangul.

Following a brief discussion on how the languages of the East and the West transformed through the ages, further are some interesting and crucial theories, providing a concise and abridged version of some myths which were similar in the nature in a way that they meant to express the same concept and yet were diametrically opposite to each other in a way that they had complete different notions and myths related to those symbols.

Conclusion

Thus, just like the Occident, the Orient also underwent massive amounts of transitions in terms of languages, myths as well as religion.

While the occidental language diverged from a single mother language (Futhorc) to produce the Germanic sounds, in and around the Germanic land, Hangul was invented as a completely new language in the farther east.

While the Occident believed that the world did not have either men or women in the beginning, the Orient believes that there was a man who existed while the creation happened and the he was the one who gave rise to every other creature that existed on the planet. While for the Occident the Dragon or the symbol of Dragon was referred to, as the symbol of malice but the Orient believes the Dragon to be something quite auspicious, holy and kingly as well.

Hence, just like the Occident, the Orient provides a huge glossary of literature, myths as well as beliefs which are worth acquiring, studying and researching upon, not just because their myths and beliefs and gods (almost everything) et-al, are diametrically opposite (but exactly similar in a lot of ways as well) to what the Occidental portrayals are, but because they are equally rich in knowledge and literature. And thus, Oriental myths and literature are also equally important and worth taking up as a discourse to get even more in-depth understanding of literary and cultural developments around the world as major literatures rather than indigenous literatures, which limits the interpretation of such literatures.

References

- Barnes, Michael P. 2005. "Runes and Editors: The Changing face of Corpus Editions". *International Journal of Runic studies*. 6th International Symposium on Runes and Runic inscriptions. Lancaster.
- Robertson, John S. 2012. "How the Germanic Futhark came from the Roman Alphabet". *International journal of Runic studies*.
- Eythorsson, Thorhallur. 2012. "Variation in the syntax of the Older Runic Inscriptions". *International journal of Runic studies*.
- Mel'nikova, Elena A. 2016. "A new Runic Inscription from Hagia Sophia cathedral in Istanbul". *International journal of Runic studies*. Institute of World history, Russian academy of Sciences. Moscow.
- Hawkins, John A. 2008. "The World's Major Languages".
- "Norse Mythology". <<https://norse-mythology.org/runes/>>, Accessed on 12/03/2019
- "Bede: A history" <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/bede/hist108.htm>>, Accessed on 12/03/2019
- "Religions in Europe" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Europe>, Accessed on 12/03/2019
- "Norse dragon" <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%AD%C3%B0h%C3%B6ggr>>, Accessed on 13/03/2019
- "The great vowel shift" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Vowel_Shift>, Accessed on 20/03/2019
- "Hangul" <<http://linguistics.byu.edu/classes/Ling450ch/reports/Korean3.html>>, Accessed on 10/03/2019
- "Korean Society" <https://koreasociety.org/special-events/annual_dinner/item/534>, Accessed on 10/03/2019
- "Korean Language" <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Korean-language>>, Accessed on 10/03/2019
- "Religion in South Korea" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_South_Korea>, Accessed on 12/03/2019
- "Goguryeo" <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Kingdoms_of_Korea#Goguryeo>, Accessed on 12/03/2019
- "Futhark" <<http://www.ancientscripts.com/futhark.html>>, Accessed on 12/03/2019