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Mayan-Hindu Connection

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In his recent visit to South America, Sri Ganapati Sthapati found many similarities between the Mayan temples and those of India [Hinduism Today, June, 1995]. My research indicates there are also similarities between the Mayan and Hindu systems of astronomy which are demonstrated in significant parallels between the Hindu Puranas and Mayan texts.

The Mayan culture flourished in Mesoamerica during the early Christian era, before being completely wiped out by the Spanish conquest. Astronomy played a significant role in Mayan culture. Venus in particular had a preeminent status. Testimony to this rich tradition is borne out by Mayan temple art and the few available Codices, or sacred books, of the Mayans. Great strides have been made recently in deciphering the Mayan script and in understanding the concepts of Mayan astronomy. Western scholars have attempted to relate the Mayan concepts to those of Greek astronomy. The sidereal Mayan astronomy is more akin to the Hindu system and does not easily fit into the Greek model.

Striking similarity is found between certain Mayan and Puranic stories, and their related astronomical interpretation. In the Puranas, Lord Vishnu is represented as resting on the serpent Ananta or Sesa, after having dissolved all creation. The serpent represents the eternity of time (Ananta), and the "remainder" (Sesa) in subtle form, of prakriti, the germ of all that has been and will be. After waking up from the yoganidra, Vishnu rides on the eagle Garuda. Both Garuda and Sesa are shown in association with Vishnu in the temples of India. It is said that Garuda represents the Vedas and the solar deities, and Sesa represents the watery deities. The serpent is of great significance in the Mayan culture also. A supreme example is the serpent of sunlight and shadow seen at Chich'én Itz'á. At the time of the equinoxes, as the Sun moves from east to west, a pattern of light and shadow appears on the west balustrade of the north stairway of the Castillo at Chich'én Itz'á. This display resembles a descending snake whose head is the monumental serpent head carved out of stone at the foot of the stairs. The feathered serpent represents the Mayan God Kukulcan, who is associated with rain water and new life, among other things. Kukulcan appears to be Sesa and Garuda combined into one.

The devas and the asuras churned the Milky Ocean in search of amrita. Vishnu assumed the form of a tortoise and dived to the bottom of the cosmic ocean. On his back, the devas and asuras placed the mount Mandara as the churn and used the serpent Vasuki as the rope. From the churned Milky Ocean emerged all planets, poisonous Halahala, many treasures, and finally, amrita. The devas wanted the nectar only for themselves. However, a serpent asura named Rahu, disguised as a deva, was able to get a share of amrita. The Sun and the Moon discovered him. Rahu's head was instantly cut off.

However, as he had already ingested amrita, he could not be killed. To this day, the head of Rahu attempts to swallow the Sun and the Moon. Rahu represents the ascending node of the moon's orbit, and swallowing of the Sun and the Moon represent symbolically the occurrence of the eclipses. There is a picture from the Maya Codex Tro-Cortesianus. It shows a tortoise, a central churning rod and a serpent being used as a rope by figures of dark and light shade. The western scholars have found it difficult to interpret this picture, but the similarity of the picture to the churning of the Milky Ocean of the Puranas is remarkable. In the Dresden Codex there are glyphs representing eclipses, depicting the Sun or the Moon as being devoured by a serpent. The similarity to the Hindu representation in which Rahu tries to devour the luminary object is unmistakable.

Finally, according to tradition, Lord Surya himself taught the science of astronomy, Surya Siddhanta, to Mayasura (perhaps the same famed architect of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata). Could it be that the Mayans are the descendants of Maya and this story could explain the importance of Venus in the Mayan astronomy? Maybe this is stretching it too far, for "Maya" means the "chosen people" in the Mayan language.

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