



## Insects and Hindu Mythology

(\*Chandan Kumar Panigrahi<sup>1</sup>, Subhalaxmi Roy<sup>2</sup> and Bijoy Kumar Mishra<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>1</sup>Naini Agricultural Institute, Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, Prayagraj, U.P., India

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Siksha O Anusandhan – Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

\*Corresponding Author's email: [cpanigrahi99@gmail.com](mailto:cpanigrahi99@gmail.com)

*“Insects did just about everything first. They were the first to form social societies, farm, and sing — just about anything you can imagine.”*

- Karl Kjer

*(Insects thrived well in all the possible habitats at times when man didn't start his life.)*

India being the centre for world's major religions like Hinduism has a great mythological significance and has active involvement of insects yet is not well explored. It is an attempt to quote the involvement of insects in various classical writings of mythology and have described their importance .

Insects have evolved on the surface of the earth 350 - 500 million years ago. Since their appearance, they have dominated all other lifeforms and with due course of time , Man used these insects for his variable life utilisation .

India being the centre for many religions is an ancient center , whose beliefs were spread to other cultures over time. It has wide cultural and religious practices, Hinduism being the major ones . However, the involvement of insects in Hindu mythology has been less studied. The earliest reports on insects in Hindu mythology were given in Vedic literature and many other classical myth writings. It would be interesting to know how the indigenous people responded and received the insects. Whether they have known their beneficial and harmful traits? In what forms they have been observed in the various classical writings? These questions need to be explored and answered to know the presence of insects during age old civilizations itself and to highlight the importance of insects.

Insects play a range of roles in Indian religions, ranging from trivial to important. These roles are commonly found in mythologies worldwide. However, the core beliefs in karma and reincarnation found in Indian religions result in a unique viewpoint towards insects not seen in other religions. The unnecessary killing of insects as well as other animals is stressed because this may have karmic consequences. Moreover, in no other religion may an insect be thought of as a potential candidate for bettering itself through future reincarnations, possibly even attaining the ultimate bliss of nirvana.

### SIMILARITIES OF INSECTS WITH HINDU GODS

1. Gods sitting on flowers like Honey bees
2. The epithet of Kali, a terrifying war goddess who wears necklace of skulls is 'The

bee.' It was believed in Hindu Mythology that spider sitting in the center of web causes illusion and reminds Hindus of a supernatural force called Maya behind the creation of world (FIGURE 1)
3. Fireflies belonging to Lampyridae, Coleoptera are called by names Kita-mani (Gem of insects) and Khadyota by Chandogya Upanishads
4. The Hindu love god, Kamadeva had a bow whose string is made of Honey bees (FIGURE 2)
5. In Hindu mythology, Goddess Parvati was summoned by the gods to kill the demon, Arunasura in the form of Brahmara Devi. She kills the demon with large number of bees emerging from her body which stung him to death. From then, Goddess Brahmara Devi has been called as 'Queen of Black Bees.' (FIGURE 3)
6. The unequal separation of Hindu religion into upper and lower castes serves as striking example of resemblance with the caste system of eusocial insects like Honey bees and ants.
7. The hard shell of Lord Vishnu (called panchajanya) is more related to hard shell of crustacean. These evidences indicate the possibility of relation between insects and Hindu gods (FIGURE 5)
8. Solid, tough metallic ornaments resembling insect exoskeleton.
9. Ability to fly to long distances
10. Multi armed structure like hexapoda
11. The termite mounds which are wrongly called as ant hills are worshipped in Hindu mythology. The clay obtained from the mound is used in Rajasuyagnas performed by Kings.
12. In Mahabharata, there was an incident where Parshuram was resting in the lap of his disciple, Karna. At that time, Lord Indra in the form of a bee stings Karna to bleed. In spite of that, Karna remains calm and bears the pain. When Parshuram came to know about it, he realized that only a Kshatriya can bear pain in silence and Karna lied to him. He then curses Karna that his Brahmastra would not work when he needed it the most. Finally, it happened during Kurukshetra and Karna died in hands of Arjuna when his Brahmastra failed him. (FIGURE 4)
13. In another incident, Kauravas try to kill Pandavas during their Vanavasam by building them a highly flammable house (Laksha griha) made of lac. The source of this lac was an insect belonging to family Kerridae, Hemiptera.
14. Apart from these examples showing direct involvement of insects, insect products also served a major purpose in Hindu Mythology. For example, Honey produced by Honey bee is used a food, in many rituals, to induce rain and as a medium to take many medicines. More over silk threads tied to wrist is believed to negate the effects of an evil eye.

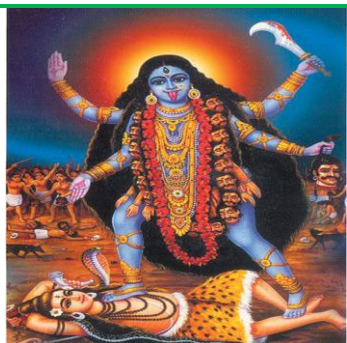


Figure 1

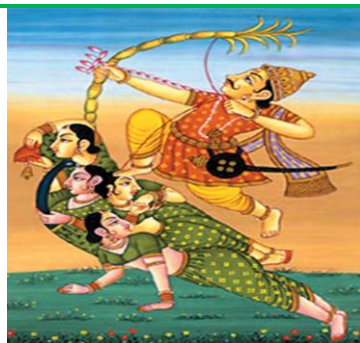


Figure 2

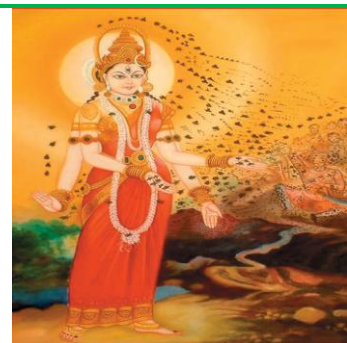


Figure 3

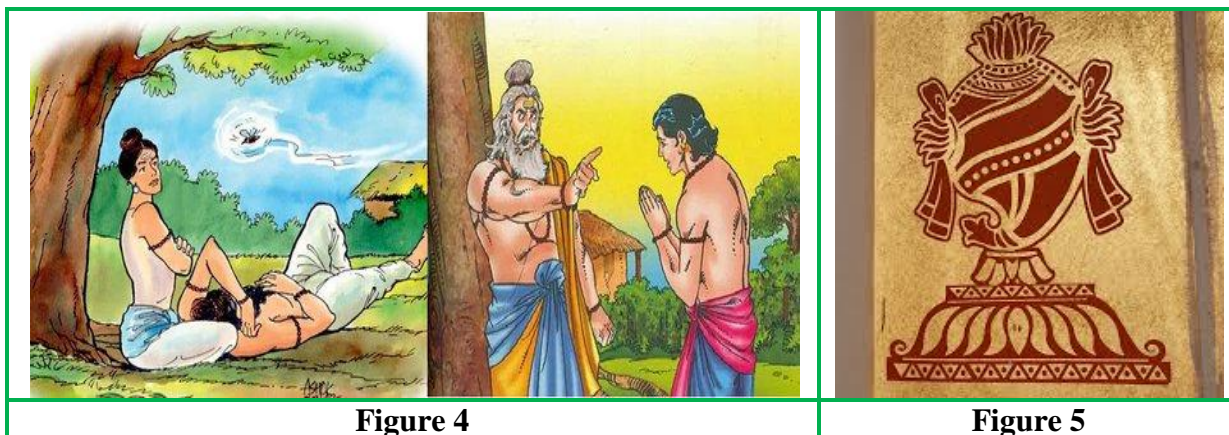


Figure 4

Figure 5

**Table 1. Arthropod references in Hinduism (Stutley and Stutley 1977).**

Arthropod	Sanskrit	Role
Ant	Gaja	Elephant figure made from ant-hill to intimidate enemies
Ant	Makha	Ants decapitate Visnu (god)
Ant	Upajihirka	Ants have considerable ritual significance and are the basis of numerous myths
Honey bee	Anna	Honey is metaphor for food in mystical sense
Honey bee	Bhringa	Victim offered at an asvamedha (horse sacrifice)
Honey bee	Kariristi	Honey is food offering to induce rain
Honey bee	Madhu	Honey widely used in rituals as remedy and for fertility
Honey bee	Mahavrata	Honey part of fertility festival
Honey bee	Susna	Vedic demon turned into lump of honey by Indra (god)
Beetle	Bhringi	A seer transforms to a beetle to complete worship
Cochineal insect	Indragopa	Associated with Indra (god) as rain giver
Silkworm	Raksa	Silk bound around wrist to avert Evil Eye
Spider	Vasistha	Sweat from Vasistha becomes venomous spiders

## References

- Cherry, R., Sandhu, H., 2013. Insects in the Religions of India. *American Entomologist* 59(4), 200-202.
- Stutley, M., Stutley, J., 1977. *Harper's dictionary of Hinduism.*, Harper and Row, New York.