

Ethnobiological Analysis from Myth to Science: I. *Panchamukhee Hanumaan*, An Empirical Representation of Ancient Animal Classification

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ABSTRACT Attempts were made to analyse the ethnobiological aspects of the structure of *Panchamukhee Hanumaan*, an unique integrated form of deity in Indian mythology, which represents the ancient animal classification depicted in *Manusmriti*.

INTRODUCTION

Study of ancient literature and mythology is a new dimension in ethnobiological research (Jain, 1987), which conveys the ancient scientific thoughts concealed within hymns of legendary epics and *Puraanas*. In this context studies on Indian mythological pictures have received little attention (Bahasam, 1977) and a pioneer attempt on it is of interest (Padhy et al., 1996). The present communication is an attempt to analyse the ethnobiological aspects of the structure of *Panchamukhee Hanumaan*, an unique integrated form of deity in Indian mythology.

ANIMAL WORSHIP IN INDIA

The motto for worshipping a particular deity in Hindu mythology, is to drag its power in order to fulfil the physical, psychological and philosophical needs of the concerned. In the *vedic* age worshipping of the nature as manifestation of God, was of prime importance and in course of time different plants, animals and various deities were introduced to mythology. It seems that the ancient people had realised that gain of animal power too was essential to be successful in life.

In Indian scenario, some of the animals like monkey, cow, bull, elephant, rat, birds, tortoise, snake and fish are worshipped directly and some deities like *Ganesh*, *Nursingha*, *Varaaha* and *Hayagreeba* having animal heads with a human body. Almost all the deities (super humans) are also found associated with one or the other animal (a sub-human) as their mount (*Vaahana*). The *Vaahana* is specific for each deity, representing the God in animal form. The characteristics of the animal usually symbolize the nature and personality of the deity (Vitasaxis, 1977). The binary nature of the *Vaahanas* and their significance also explained from social point of view (Bera, 1996). However analysis of the mount animals is a metaphysically oriented ecological aspects which is beyond the scope of this paper and has reservations for our future communication.

Animal worship, even though is symbolic, it plays a vital role in conservation of animals. In many instances particular animals associated with the deities are ordinarily not killed (rather conserved) by the sect of worshippers. The cow as the mother, is famous in our country and commonly we are hospitable to an ox. Similarly people are reluctant to kill a snake, a rat or a cat. It is observed that feeding the crow in the morning before onsetting the hotel business, is an out come of the influence of mythology. Even in the day to day ritual of the Hindus like *Vaishnavadeva Pujaa*, a special share of food is dedicated for dogs, crows and insects, which shows the highest philosophical thought for conservation of animals (Dash and Padhy, 1998b). Moreover the Black buck (*Krushnasaara mruga* - *Antelope*

cervicapra) known since the vedic age as an ecological indicator, is protected in different areas of our country naturally by local people from aesthetic point of view (Padhy et al., 1997a) and conservation of fishes, rats and monkeys in various religious places is not uncommon.

PANCHAMUKHEE HANUMAAN

Hanumaan worship is popular in India as evident from the extensive literature published by prestigious *Geeta Press* (*Kalyaana Hanu-man Anka*, 1975). In this compilation out of the record of 160 famous ancient *Hanumaan* temples in the country, only three places *Panchamukhee Hanumaan* is worshipped and probably the idol of Ujjayinee is the oldest among them. Of course the establishment of many new temples with this deity are coming up day by day.

Description of the Deity

The *Panchamukhee* (five faced) form of *Hanumaan* is a combination of five God heads in animal form attached to the *Vaanara* (Monkey) *ssareera* (body). According to the sanskrit script *Shree Vidyarnaba Tantra* (*Hanumat prakarana*) *Hanumaan* is faced to the east (front) and the *Singha* (lion), *Garuda* (Eagle) and *Varaaha* (wild pig) faces are directed to south, west and north respectively, the *Haya* (horse) face amidst the latter four directed upwards, with *Aayudhas* (weapons) like *Khadga*, *Trissula*, *Khatwaanga*, *Passa*, *Ankusa*, *Parvata*, *Stambha*, *Mushthi*, *Gada* and *Vrukshya* handled in ten arms. The picture available in the market (Fig. 1), has the specific faces but their directions are not according to the *Hanumat Prakarana* because of the two dimensional plan of the picture and the weapons are also not as per the mythology. Moreover the *Garuda* face is like human form with a long nose as the beak of carnivorous birds.

Ethnobiological Aspects

The most ancient biological classification depicted in the legendary epic *Manusmruti* has divided the animals into three groups (Das and Padhy, 1997):

1. *Yaraayuja* (born from womb - animals)
2. *Andaja* (born from egg - Fishes, Reptiles and Aves)

3. *Swedaja* (born out of filthy hot moist atmosphere and eutrophication - Flies, Bugs Mosquitoes and all other nonchordates).

Among the *Yaraayuja* the mammals are further divided into three groups such as:

1. Herbivore
 - (a) Domesticated
 - (b) Free living
2. Carnivore
3. Human forms
 - (a) *Raakshaasa*
 - (b) *Pisaacha*
 - (c) *Manushya* (man)

In the *Panchamukhee Hanumaan* form all the prominent representative members of *Yaraayuja* and *Andaja* divisions are reflected such as*:

- (1) **The Horse** (*Haya-Equus caballus*-herbivore domesticated-represented as deity *Hayagreeba*, one form of Lord *Vishnu* - unit of power measurement as per science - worshipped to overcome demonic forces).
- (2) **The Wild Pig** (*Varaaha - Hylochoerus meinerzhagenie* - herbivore, powerful, free living - represented as deity *Varaaha avataara*, 3rd incarnation of Lord *Vishnu* - Herbs are the source of medicine - worshipped as remedy for all feverish diseases).
- (3) **The Lion** (*Singha Panthera leo* - Carnivore - represented as deity *Nrushingha avataara*, 4th incarnation of Lord *Vishnu* - King of the forest at the top trophic level - worshipped to overcome fear psychosis).
- (4) **The Eagle** (*Garuda - Aquila sp/Haliaeetus sp?* - representative of all *Andaja* - mount of Lord *Vishnu* - use snakes as prey in food chain - worshipped against poisonous effects).
- (5) **The Monkey** (*Vaanara - Macaca sp/Presbytes sp?*, the anthropoides - *Vaanara*, alternative man, represented in lieu of man - Great devotee of *Bhagawaan Sri Raamachandara*, 7th incarnation of Lord *Vishnu* - vegetarian, most powerful warrior - worshipped to demolish all sorts of enemies).

The integration of four animal heads with the *Vaanara* body certainly signified the

* The description as follows: English name - Sanskrit name - Zoological name - position as per *Manusmruti* classification - Mythological speciality - Any other Ethnobiological speciality - worshipped for, as per *Shree Vidyaranava Tantra*.



Fig. 1. Pictural representation of Panchamukhee Hanumaan (Marketed by J.B. Khanna & Co.)

empirical depiction of the animal classification as described above; but the human form as per classification is replaced by *Vaanara* (alternative man). In this context to have more insight into the fact, it is essential to analyse the concept of the vedic people regarding the position of *Vaanaras* in the animal kingdom.

VAANARA FROM VEDA TO ANTHROPOLOGY

In vedic literature *Vaanara* were not equalised with the other free living herbivore animals and considered nearer to man. In a different classification all the animals are divided into two groups. 1. *Mukhaadaana*: taking hold by mouth. (2) *Hastaadaana*: taking hold by hand. (*Hasta* - Hand - power of capturing - Padhy et al., 1997b). In the second group *Vaanara* is equalised with human beings as user of hands for holding (*Taittiriya Samhitaa* vi, 4, 5, 7; *Maitraayani Samhitaa* iv, 5, 7).

There are references where *Vaanaras* are used as alternate to man such as *Maayu* (Ape) or *Kimhpurusha* (*Vaajasaneeyi Samhitaa*, *Taittiriya Samhitaa* iv, 2, 10; *Satapatha Braahmana*, vii, 5, 2, 22); *Purusha Mrga* (the man wild beast - *Taittiriya Samhitaa* v, 5, 15; *Maitraayani Samhitaa* III, 14, 16); *Purusha Hastin* (The man with a hand: *Vaajasaneeyi Samhitaa* xxiv, 29; *Maitraayani Samhitaa*, iii, 14, 8) (Macdonell and Keith, 1912).

The *Vedas* were thought to be compiled in *Kretaa yuga* which was followed by *Tretaa yuga* famous for *Raamaayana*. In this epic *Vaanaras* are represented as selfless, humble and devoted, being most powerful associated with *Bhaagawaan Sri Raamachandra* to rescue mother *Seeta*. There are more evidence in *Raamaayana* to consider *Vaanaras* as human beings than animals such as:

1. *Professionals*: There were learned persons (*Hanuman*, *Angada*); Kings (*Vaali*, *Sugreeba*, *Kessari*); Doctors (*Sussena*); Engineers (*Nala*, *Neela*) and priests, soldiers as well, were associated with *Sri Raam's* army.
2. *Clothing*: The tails of the so called *Vaanaras* was not a part and parcel of their body. It is interpreted as a part of their national robe

and a sign of prestige. This is quite evident from the instance that had the tail be a part of the body, *Hanumaan* would have felt pain occurred there of, when it was burnt by order of *Raavana* during his first visit to *Lanka*. The *Vaanara* people were changing their dresses according to their need of the situation. Prior to the commencement of the battle, *Sri Raama* had given the instructions to all the *Vaanara Sena* to be in the monkey (form) robes as army uniform and he himself alongwith *Laxmana*, *Bibheeshana* and his four followers were in human dress. This was essential to distinguish with army one from another. Most probably *Vaanaras* were described as monkey in poetic sense to distinguish them as a separate group (Das, 1991).

3. *Education*: It is described that *Hanumaan* was a sanskrit scholar. When he first met *Raama* and *Laxmana* near the *Rishyamuka* Hills, he was dressed like a *Braahmin* and conversed in sanskrit with the two brothers to know their identity.
4. *Character*: *Hanumaan* is known as a *brahmachaari* since the ages. But it is never possible in case of an animal to practice celibacy.
5. *The Race*: In the present society there are surnames like *Singha* (Lion), *Naaga* (Cobra), *Bhalla* (Bhaalu-Bear), *Baagha* (Tiger), *Ssandha* (Ox, Bull) and *Haatee* (Elephant). Similarly *Vaanara* or *Markata* may be, was a surname for a sect of people in *Tretaa yuga*. In *Dwaapara Yuga* *Hanumaan* is given highest regard in *Mahaabhaarata* being at the top of *Bhavawaan Sree Krishna's Kapidhwaja Ratha* (Chariot). Moreover, he is described as the brother of *Bheemasena* by virtue of the parental origin of *Vaayu devataa*.

In modern science Anthropology traces the origin of human beings, *Homo sapien* to the ancestors of the *Vaanaras* such as Java ape man, Neanderthal man and Cro-magnon man etc. The resemblance of man with Gorilla, Chimpanzee and Orang-utan like tail less monkey of anthropoid category supports more to the vedic or puranic views on *Vaanaras* as a evolutionary group nearer to man than considering as mere monkey.

CONCLUSION

The *Tantra* philosophy is a reinterpretation of *Veda*, for modern man which is formulated in the present age, *Kaliyuga* (Bernard, 1989). Since the description of *Panchamukhee Hanumaan* is traced in *Sree Vidyaarnabatantra*, the evolution of this synthetic deity is of *Kaliyuga* origin. But the representation of human form by a *Vaanara*, in this empirical representation of animal classification, raises a question.

One possible explanation is that, according to *Manusmruti*, *Manushya* (man) is physically and physiologically a vegetarian and *Smruti* has devoted much to make man conscious of his food habit (Dash and Padhy, 1988a). But it is also identified that there is inherent tendency of man to eat flesh and go for carnal sex (*Sl. 56/V. Manusmruti*), which is responsible for diversification of human forms as *Raakshaasa*, *Pisaacha* and *Manushya* (A cultural classification). In order to avoid such confusion, during the formulation of *Panchamukhee Hanumaan* deity, the human form is represented by *Vaanara* (Va+nara= Alternative man) which is a pure vegetarian and considered to be ancestors of man from *vedic* age to modern Anthropology. This again reinforces the idea of creating vegetarian food consciousness in man through mythology. However, the possibility of a factual presentations of the deity, to explain the trend of evolution reaching to the climax through the *Vaanaras*, cannot be ruled out.

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