



APOCALYPSE IN HINDU MYTHOLOGY AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The Apocalypse for Hinduism is the natural end of the world at the end of the Kalpa, which is the one round completion of the cycle of the four ages or the Yugas; Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga, and Kali Yuga. They keep on coming at recurring intervals. According to Hindu scriptures currently, we are living in the Kali Yuga. Once the four Yugas are passed, it becomes a Mahayuga or Chatur Yuga. 1000 Mahayugas make up one Kalpa. A Kalpa makes just one day for Brahma. After the day is over, Brahma sleeps. When he sleeps, the state is called 'Pralaya'. The Pralaya is the night of Brahma, and it equates the span of a Kalpa. The present paper discusses the mention of Apocalypse in Hindu mythology and culture.

Key Words: Apocalypse, Hinduism, Yuga, Pralaya

INTRODUCTION

Hindu timeline of existence, both that of the Soul and also that concerning the existence of the world, is circular. This is the unique feature of Hindu Karma system. The point of the complete apocalypse is not mentioned in the scriptures of Hinduism. As described in different Puranas and religious anecdotes, one age passes the new age comes and after passing the one cycle of four ages, the complete overhaul takes place which may be put, in a way, the point of apocalypse.

In the *Srimadbhagwadgita*, which is a pious and authoritative scripture of Hindu philosophy, knowledge and religion, Lord Krishna (the representation of the Eternal Soul) speaks to Arjuna (the representation of the human self), as follows; “*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati Bhārata/Abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmyaham*”(Gita, 4.7). It means Bharat (a name of Arjuna), whenever decay in righteousness is observed, and the people get deviated from their avowed duties; I manifest Myself (on Earth) for the sake of maintaining righteousness and establishing dutifulness and religion. This statement suggests

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that the end of days of this Earth takes place, according to Hindu Mythology, when there is the state of maximum sins, and the world is full of wicked people. When the vices overflow, the God, Himself, brings an end to the system of the world (mentioned in the scriptures as the state of *Sanhar*) for creating a new one (*Srijan*). This perspective of the creation (*Srijan*) and destruction (*Vinash*) is mentioned as the cycle of time as further Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, “*paritraanaayasaadhoonaamvinaashaayachadushkritaam dharmasansthaapaanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge*” (Gita, 4.8). In Hindu mythology, this cycle of time consists of the Kalpas. Each Kalpa spans between 4.1 – 8.2 billion years comprising many revolutions of the four Yugas, namely the Satya Yuga, the Treta Yuga, the Dvapara Yuga, the finally the Kali Yuga. The cycle of Kalpa begins with the Satya Yuga, which is followed by other three Yugas in a given order. Satya Yuga spans 1.728 million years. Treta Yuga follows it spanning 1.296 million years. Then comes Dvapara Yuga lasting 864,000 years followed by the Kali Yuga, the last of the Yugas in the Kalpa, and spanning about 432,000 years (Gombrich 121).

A Kalpa makes Brahma's one complete day and a night. According to scriptures and myths, ‘**Brahma lives for 311 trillion and 40 billion years.** The span of a Kalpa completes through the phases of Creation (*Srijan*), Preservation (*Rakshan*) and Decline (*Sanhar*). Once the cycle of the Kalpa gets complete, Brahma, the creator returns to the singularity, and it becomes the point of Apocalypse’ (Gombrich 122). At this point in time, the existing universe comes to an end, and from here begins the new universe. As an illustration to it, the statement of Lord Krishna mentioned in the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* is appropriate to mention. Lord Krishna speaks to Goddess Ganga (the river Ganges incarnation) that in the Kali Yuga, she will be the only source of redemption for the sins of a human being on this Earth. This phase will go for approximately five thousand years, and after that, there will be a phase of a total eclipse of goodness in the world. The world will get indulged in a complete mode of corruption, various kinds of physical and emotional crimes and misdeeds. To cite the referred verse from the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, “*Kaleh pancasahasrani varshani tishtha bhutale, Paapani paapino yani tubhyam dashyanti snanatah!*” (Sen, 4.129.50). Once this phase of the eclipse of goodness will occur, says Lord Krishna, that only the name chanting of Lord will pave way for salvation (*Mukti*). The name chanting of God will purify the souls (Sen 553). It is further mentioned in the Purana, “*Kaler dash-sahasraani madbhaktaah samti bhu-tale/ekavarna bhavishyamti madbhakteshu gateshu ca.*” (Sen, 4.129.59). To explain, “In this design, after the passing of ten thousand years, there shall be the departure of the devotees, and there shall be the end of the universe for beginning a new one with only one Varna (entity).

Thus, the Apocalypse for Hinduism is the natural end of the world at the end of the Kalpa, which is as mentioned above the one round completion of the cycle of the four ages.

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According to Hindu scriptures currently we are living in the Kali Yuga. *Vishnu Purana* has given a presage that this age will be characterized by the malpractices of wickedness, violence, and decay. The *Vishnu Purana* has mentioned certain salient features of the age, to list here, some of these stands that the property and wealth, and not the accomplishments shall be the indicator of one's social status. Passion, luxury, vices, falsehood, superficiality, and emptiness of rituals etc shall galore the social, cultural and religious milieu. The scripture further illustrates the imminent downfall in the part of the rulers, society, dharma, values and the world. To mention some of these, the Kings of the world, in Kali Yuga, shall not remain and work in peace. They will create a quite belligerent and aggressive state of the world affairs. Due to the prevailing vices of their destructive vision, anger, dishonesty, intrigues and malicious intents, they shall involve themselves in all kinds of vices, and subsequently, they shall be indulged in the heinous crimes and sins. They shall become habitual of lying and doing all kinds of unfavorable and wicked deeds. Their administration shall inflict death and torture upon women, children, and cows, and shall be eager to transgress the rights of others. Their reign shall also be short, and their whole temperament shall be governed by the state of *Tamas* i.e. the greed of mind and the acts of troubling others. Almost thinking and behaving like barbarians, these kings shall be short-lived and perverted. As far as Dharma i.e. duty is concerned, that will be quite fragile and deviated from the path of righteousness. Mental-physical and verbal sins shall galore the state of affairs. Due to these diversions and weaknesses in general human and institutional character, quarrels, plague, fatal diseases, starvation, famine, and many other forms of natural and man-made calamities shall appear and envelope the world. The fact in a matter shall lose its sanctity, and so will be the fate of the testimonies and proofs. Even the strength and luster of people will wane. Avarice, anger, sin, falsehood, adulterated teachings, food and misconduct shall affect the overall personality of a human being in the Kali Yuga (*Vishnu Purana*, VI.1.10-67). It is also predicted in *Shrimad Bhagvatam*, "*sri-suka uvaca tatas canu-denim dharmahsatyam saucam ksama dayakalena balina rajannanksyaty ayur balam smrtih* (12.2.1). It declares that religion, truthfulness, cleanliness, tolerance, mercy, duration of life, physical strength and memory will diminish with each passing day. This will be because of the powerful influence of the age of Kali. Moreover, "*vittam eva kalau nramjanmacara-gunodayadharma-nyaya-vyavasthayamkaranam balam eva hi*" (12.2.2). Wealth alone will alone determine the sign of a man's good fortunes, proper behaviour and fine qualities. Only the people in power will get justice. Further the Purana says that the people of inferior virtues and abilities shall become kings. Even many heretics shall come to picture. Many false Sanyasi shall also emerge, and consequently many false and beguiling religious sects too. The scriptures also narrate many issues related with piety, value and demeanor, finally suggesting that Kali Yuga will see a marked fall in almost every aspect of human life.



In the scriptures it is said that some times in the Kali Yuga itself Lord Vishnu will take incarnation in the form of Kalki. Kalki will be the tenth Avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu. The scriptures illustrate the appearance of Kalki as a great Soul riding a white horse and carrying a sword. The 10th Strota (cluster of verses) of *Sri Dasavatara Stotra* mentions, “*mleccha-nivaha-nidhanekalayasikaravalamdhumaketumivakimapikaralamkesava dhrita-kalki-sarira jaya jagadisa hare.*” It means O Kesava, O Hari, who has taken the form of Kalki! You appear like a comet and carry a petrifying sword for the sake of the destruction of the wicked and barbarian men at the end of the Kali Yuga. Lord Kalki is foretold to have eight mystic powers and eight special qualities of Godhead. He will present his unmatched effulgence and riding on a great steed Devadutta, and will kill millions of the scoundrels. The details about the avatar of Lord Kalki are given in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and the *Brahmanda Purana*. According to these scriptures, Kalki will take incarnation as a son to a pious Brahmin named Vishnuyasa at the transition phase of the two Yugas; Kali Yuga coming to an end, and the Satya Yuga imminent. (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 12.2.19-20)

Linga Purana, *Kalki Purana*, *Brahmanda Purana* and *Vaayu Purana* mention his activities. He will start the operation reaching the age of thirty two, and shall wander the Earth for purifying it for twenty years. He will have a big army of horses, chariots, and elephants. Hundreds and thousands of spiritually trained and knowledgeable Brahmins shall accompany Him, although He shall not be seen by any living being. About his weapons, it is mentioned that they shall be Brahminical weapons, not the ordinary one. The weapons shall work with mantras. In this way, Lord Kalki will finish the wicked people from this Earth. As it is mentioned in *Srimad Bhagvatam*, “*atha tesham bhavishyanti manamsi vishadani vai vasudevanga-ragati- punya-gandhanila-sprishampaura-janapadanam vai hatesv akhila-dasyushu*”, after all the imposter kings have been killed, Lord Kalki will give a feeling of relief to the residents of the cities and towns. They will feel the breeze of safety, security and peace. They shall enjoy the most sacred fragrance of the sandalwood paste and other decorations on the effulgent body of Lord Kalki. In its aura, the minds of the citizen shall become pure. It will bring a transcendental feeling. All wickedness will vanish and the world will move to the phase of the Satya Yuga.

In this way the wicked people will be annihilated but the world will not come to an end. The four yugas ; Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga, and Kali Yuga keep on coming at recurring intervals.

Once the four yugas are passed, it becomes a Mahayuga or Chatur Yuga. 1000 Mahayugas make up one Kalpa. A Kalpa makes just one day for Brahma. After the day is over, Brahma sleeps. When he sleeps the state is called Pralaya . The Pralaya is the night of Brahma, and it equates the span of a Kalpa. During the Pralaya the three worlds; the Mratayaloka (the world

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of human beings) the Devaloka (the world of gods and goddesses) and the Asuraloka (the world of demons) are destroyed. The higher Lokas, namely the Satya Loka, the Tapa Loka, the Gyana Loka, and the Mahar Loka remain protected and safe. In the state of the Mahapralaya, the entire fourteen Lokas come to an end.

We have the references of Apocalypse in the form of the *Pralay* (literally, “destruction”). The *Vishnu Purana* suggests that the world will be ended by the *Pralay*, describing it as an all-engulfing flood (1.7.24-40). In Hindu cosmogony, *Pralaya* denotes the mass devastation or mass Dissolution. In *Markandeya Purana* Lord Shiva instructs for and observes the *Pralaya*. He performs his cosmic Tandava dance, and by the steps of this cosmic Tandava, the phases of *Pralaya* take place. After the *Pralaya* is over, Brahama wakes up from his slumber and begins the creation of a new universe (Gombrich 123). In the scriptures, even Brahma’s age is also determined which is, “*Sahasra-yuga-paryantamaharyadbrahmanoviduhratrimyuga-sahasrantamte 'ho-ratra-vido janah*” (Gita, 8.17). After a hundred years of Brahma it becomes a Mahakalpa. After the end of a Mahakalpa, Brahma ends His form to take a new one for a New Mahakalpa. One Mahapralay span for a Mahakalpa. After one Mahakalpa, the other Mahakalpa comes to being. This way the cycle goes on. Thus the end of days or Apocalypse in Hinduism is rather an implicit and circular phenomenon. In Hinduism, the pace of time has been shown in circular motion. It goes on.

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