

LEGENDARY NARRATIVE OF KING VIKRAMADITYA: AN ARCHETYPE FOR SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

The immortal memory of the legendary king Vikramaditya is not merely a eulogised ideal belonging to the past, but is rather a potential living reality which inspires generations even now. A substantial expanse of Indian folk literature continues to rekindle our consciousness with the ephemeral memory of king Vikramaditya. The mythic narrative concerning legendary king Vikramaditya contains archetypal data, which can aid in restructuring a better world view for contemporary socio-cultural order based on spiritual reinforcement.

Keywords: Vikramaditya, Archetype, Socio-Cultural Transformation, Spiritual evolution.

Human engagement with the reminiscence and recalling the glories of the past has been eternal and infinite. The legendary king Vikramaditya appears in literature and myths as the epitome of justice, valour and rightful conduct. The question of king Vikramaditya's historicity has captured public fascination and ignited scholarly debates. While the historic narrative of Vikramaditya, the historical person, is ambiguous and lacking in epigraphic evidence. The legend of Vikramaditya, the mythic hero, is ever-green and timeless.

He is usually regarded as the universal ruler of India with his head-quarters at Ujjain in Avanti or Malwa region, though, in a few early cases, he is called 'the lord of Pataliputra' (the capital of Magadha). There are multitude myths, highlighting qualities of the ideal king, reiterating the significance of the mythic rather than historic persona of the legendary hero.

He appears in myths as a super human preserver of the weak and oppressed, an incarnation of valour and righteousness that earned him the name 'Sahasanka' (literally, 'one whose characteristic mark is the daring courage'), and a liberator of India from foreigners, often specifically called the Sakas. His greatest achievement was the destruction of the Sakas and this is illustrated by his epithet or secondary name Sakari (Sakadvis, etc.) meaning 'the Enemy of the Sakas'.

Vikramaditya may be best understood, not as a single historic person but rather as an epitome of qualities assumed by great kings from time to time. Tradition thus places Vikramaditya in the first century B.C.E. Several Indian kings, looked up to the legendary king Vikramaditya and the name Vikramaditya became a venerable title for seekers aspiring for the glory like Raja Vikramaditya.

The Jain text Kalakacharya Kathinaka elaborates upon the narrative of Vikramaditya of Ujjayini. It outlines the story about Gardabhila, King of Ujjayini, who abducted Saraswati, the sister of a Jain monk Kalaka. Kalaka, in order to take revenge sought help of the Saka chiefs settled on the territory on the other side of the Indus. The Sakas defeated Gardabhila and seized Ujjayini. The king Vikramaditya, defeated the Sakas, and started an era of his own, known as Vikram Samvat. One thirty-five years after 'Vikrama-Samvat', the Sakas won back Ujjayini again and started an era of their own, the Saka era.

Another account of Vikramaditya appears in Gathasaptasati, a Prakrit anthology composed by Hala, the king of Pratihasthana. Yet another text, the BrihatKatha by Gunadhya, written in Paisachi Prakrit. The original text is lost, but the tales are recounted in two important Sanskrit works, the Brihat Kathamanjari of Kshemendra and Katha Saritsagar of Somadeva. The Jain Pattavalis, written in Prakrit, which record the names of rulers or Avanti chronologically, place a king named Vikramaditya about the middle of the first Century BCE.

The Harivamsha too mentions to the Gardabhila, the lineage belonging to Vikramaditya and records a list or rulers of Ujjain in chronological order. The Puranas provide a general reference to the Gardabhilas, while the Bhavishaya Puran specifically mentions Vikramaditya as the king of Avanti, born to destroy the Sakas and to establish Aryan religion. The Kumar Khand of Skand Puran also mentions king Vikramaditya three thousand years after the beginning of the Kali Age.

Despite the reference to Vikramaditya in several texts, the evidence of his historic persona, is subject to scholarly debate on several counts. Several scholars assert that Vikramaditya belonged to the Gardabhila clan of Malwa and established the era called the Vikram Samvat. However, this theory is not without counter arguments as, firstly, the name Vikramaditya is not associated with the Vikrama era from the time of its foundation and has also been referred to as Krita and Malwa eras. Secondly, the post Christian era, often refers to the Saka era rather than to Vikrama Samvat to indicate the date of their compositions.

Thus, we infer that the historic narrative of legendary king Vikramaditya is incongruous and marked by gaps yet continues to inspire generations as an archetype of positive influence. To discuss briefly, the archetypes can fundamentally be construed as universal, collective archaic patterns and images comprising the collective unconscious. They exist at the core of our psyche in primitive, original and raw states. They constitute the universal inherited potential which is actualized when they spring from the preverbal realm of the unconscious, where they exist in an inchoate and indescribable state until given form in consciousness in the typology of images, or manifest behavior, or forms of thought and experience governing the actions, thoughts and perceptions both at individual and societal levels.

The archetype per se existing in the “psychoid realm”, in elemental form, as such is unknowable, inexplicable and ir-representable. It is however the manifest archetype-image or the “constellate” that stimulates a synthesis of perception and comprehension and which we conveniently apprehend as the archetype.

The etymological origin of the word ‘archetype’ stems from the Latin word ‘archetypum’, which is a derivative of the Greek word archétypon, (archétypos - adjective form). The term derives its meaning “the original form” from the word archein (verb form meaning beginning or origin) and the word ‘typos’ (noun form meaning model, form).

The Jungian concept of the archetype is based on works of several predecessors pertaining to - diverse faculties of study, different chronological periods, separate geographical boundaries and cultural units. The earliest scrutable notion of the archetype concerns the Platonic concept of ‘idea’, which suggests the presence of a pure mental form, etched in the soul before emerging on the Earth. To state in a simplistic sense, the Platonic archetype refers to a ‘model’ or ‘standard’ for objects prevailing in the real world. It is thus a process of controlling of forms, against a perfect standard or ideal.

The Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus construed the archetypes as the ideas present in God’s mind, the perfect and original model for all things. Kant’s notion of ‘categories’ and Schopenhauer’s concept of ‘prototypes’ and Schellingian percepts on ‘symbolization of myths’ are significant precursors to Jungian theory, to mention a few.

The Jungian notion of archetype is multifarious and was defined several times by Jung on numerous occasions in his extensive career. Though the archetype evolved through different phases, by different authors, Jung imparted it an innate structure as a psychological construct. Jung defines the archetype as:

...an irrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at any time. (PVC, Vol.10, 449).

At yet another instance he holds: “Archetypes are the psychic residua of innumerable experiences of the same type.” (SMAL, Vol.15, 81-2).

In Psychology and Religion: West and East, Jung defines the archetypes in the following words:

Archetypes are by definition, factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterised as archetypal, but in such a way that they can be recognised only from the effects they produce. They exist preconsciously and presumably they form the structural dominant of the psyche in general. They may be compared to the presence of the crystal lattice in a saturated solution. As a-priori conditioning factors, they represent a special biological instance of the biological pattern or behavior, which gives all living organisms their specific qualities. Just as the manifestation of this biological ground plan may change in the course of development, so also those of the archetype. Empirically considered, however, the archetype did not ever come into existence as a phenomenon of organic life but entered into the picture with life itself. (Jung, 220-21)

The archetypal theory had been applied in literature, most prominently by Maud Bodkin, Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell. With respect to literature, the archetypes comprise characters, events, stories or images that recur in diverse works, different cultures and in different chronological periods. The archetypes have been studied across different categories such as different literary genres, situations and such categorises per se. Jung believed that true works of art were “beyond the personal concerns of its creator” and held that “primordial images are the common heritage of the Mankind.”

The present study aims to study king the example set by king Vikramaditya as an embodiment of the values proclaimed by the Indic Tradition. The narrative of Vetala Panchavinsati introduces us to the great king Vikramaditya, well known for his great sense of justice. In the narrative of Vetala Panchavinsati, the tantric monk persuades the king to bring vetala hanging from the sesame tree in the cremation ground for the occult ritual he is performing. The king meets Vetala who will prove to be his most trusted mentor. Vetala gives him advise in the form of a challenge - each time the king tries to capture the Vetala, he would tell a story that ends with a riddle. If the king cannot answer the question correctly, Vetala would consent to remaining in captivity. If the king knows the answer but still keeps quiet, then his head shall burst into thousand pieces. And if he answers the question correctly, Vetala would escape and return to the tree. The king agrees to Vetala's unfamiliar rules and conditions and decides to undertake the journey in the dark, dangerous, unknown realm. The tantric plans to sacrifice the king to goddesses Kali, but Vetala reveals him the plan and suggests him to kill the tantric instead. The king returns to his kingdom unharmed.

King Vikramaditya is proclaimed as a chakravarti king, a king of the vidyadhaars as he receives blessings of goddess Kaali. He is also befriended by Vetala, who agrees to come to his rescue whenever he needs him.

In a metaphoric sense, the legend appears as a quest for the Self which remains hidden by the unfathomable depths of the unconscious. The narrative seems to portray the philosophy of the Indic school of Raja Yoga which proclaims the raja yogi as a great king or a master who can control his inner kingdom through the five senses. The narrative of Vikramaditya illustrates that one who undertakes the journey through his own unconscious self in the right manner while uploading dharma is indeed a great master of the kingdom of his own self.

The account of king Vikramaditya in the famous collection of folk tales, Simhasana Dvatimsika. narrates thirty-two qualities which a great king must imbibe. The story recounts that how the Parmar King Bhoj whose is historically estimated to have lived around 1000-1100 AD in Ujjain discovers the throne of king Vikramaditya.

The narrative accounts that king Bhoja came to know about a young shepherd boy who had become famous for his infallible sense of judgement. He wondered why people sought refuge in a young shepherd boy when it came to matters of settling disputes. The simple shepherd boy enacted like a judge when he sat on a mound. The king became curious and ordered an excavation of the site. The team of excavators discovered an exquisite throne buried beneath the mound. He became convinced that the throne belonged to Vikramaditya, the great

king who ruled over Ujjain much before him. The king was renowned for his infallible sense of justice and it followed that the throne of Vikramaditya ushered a sense of justice in the shepherd boy when he unknowingly sat on the mound.

But the moment he tries to sit on it, he is prevented from doing so by the thirty-two puppets which guard the throne. During each of his attempts one of them comes alive and tells him that he cannot sit on the throne unless he proves one of the virtues possessed by the greatness King Vikramaditya. Likewise the puppets recount thirty-two qualities which one must possess in order to become a great ruler like the great Vikramaditya.

They also narrate a tale each to reiterate the exemplary qualities which include – valour, charity, valour, good governance, benevolence, humility, sacrifice, and absolute selflessness. The character of the great king Vikramaditya thus serves as the epitome of morals and values to be inculcated and practised by anyone wanting to become a great king.

The narrative of Vikramaditya is replete with traditional Indic wisdom. Our ancestors used the art of storytelling and to transform citizens into enlightened spiritual beings. Today, we typically refer to these tales merely for entertainment and never look beyond for inspiration. The narratives of our traditional folk-lore like the legend of king Vikramaditya contain archetypal content which can carry forward the essence of our cultural wisdom and stimulate more enlightened citizens. The narrative of Vikramaditya can thus go a long way in fostering spiritual development and nation building.

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