



Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization

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This book interprets for the Western mind the key motifs of India's legends, myth, and folklore, taken directly from the Sanskrit, and illustrated with seventy plates of Indian art. It is primarily an introduction to image-thinking and picture-reading in Indian art and thought, and it seeks to make the profound Hindu and Buddhist intuitions of the riddles of life and death recognizable not merely as Oriental but as universal elements.

Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization Details

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From Reader Review Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization for online ebook

Brian Sullivan says

Anybook that attempts to translate Indian motif to the Western mind will be criticised by some of the subcontinent. Indian symbol is so diverse and expressive after all.

As an overview this is a beautiful attempt for a non India to gain some grasp to build on if he ever seeks to submerge himself in the ocean of Indian thought.

Riku Sayuj says

The most reverent, lyrical and aesthetically pleasing treatment of Indian thought that I have come across since The Discovery of India. Zimmer was a genius much ahead of his time.

Jigar Brahmbhatt says

I will let it all settle in; and revel in the mighty imagination of the folks who dared to envision the circularity of events and the multiple, disorienting manifestations of that which has 'no other'. Dr. Zimmer, gifted with extraordinary neatness of words, and a scholar of remarkable depth, has my greatest regards.

Aryanne says

The work is clear, concise and well-ordered. It really gives you a piece of the picture when it comes to the mentality of the people behind this beautiful art and symbolism.

Kirtida Gautam says

Wow. Okay.

The real treasure lies buried in the innermost recess of our own home.

Reading Indian myths and symbols enriches my mind and soul, the way a healthy and nutritious meal enriches the body.

A very good read.

Eibrajam says

Un libro introductorio al pensamiento hinduista, escrito con una prosa que juega con el éxtasis de la poesía.

Además de tener láminas y unas maravillosas interpretaciones de la iconografía, relata muchos de los mitos de los diversos textos hindúes mas no los aísla, sino que se atreve a compararlos con los mitos de las religiones de occidente. Por otro lado, la historia de la construcción del libro añade ciertos trazos dramáticos a su lectura: siendo conferencias que Heinrich Zimmer dio en Columbia tras su emigración de Europa por causa de la persecución de su esposa (judía) durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el autor no tuvo oportunidad de compilar los textos, pues un día enfermó y a la semana murió súbitamente por una neumonía. Otro titán del estudio del Mito, Joseph Campbell, se encargó de revisar los textos de Zimmer para darle la forma final al océano de pensamientos. Dos cosas (además de las obvias) rescato de este texto: la transmisión de la pasión que siente Zimmer por el pensamiento de India y un proceso de transformación interna conforme uno avanza en la lectura, un proceso de transformación precipitado por un maravillarse más tirado a la imaginación y las concepciones religiosas que a la sorpresa de la razón. Sin duda, libro de cabecera.

Florin Buzdugan says

magistral

David Melbie says

This book is awesome. I am always fascinated by India's rich spiritual heritage. They use some pretty grotesque symbols to convey certain concepts, and the art is sublime. A good read.

Ross says

Brilliant and thought provoking. Offers stimulating interpretation of mythic iconography of varying kinds, while relating information in an easy to follow format. It's got pictures too, WOOT!

Zach says

A book full of wonder. The retelling of the myths is detailed with restrained but illuminating analysis & interpretation. This book brings even more life to my readings of the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita (et al). The descriptions of the plates and artifacts are animated and superbly effective. A must read for anyone curious about myths & symbols in Indian art and civilization.

From the conclusion:

"Now the real treasure, to end our misery and trials, is never far away; it is not to be sought in any distant region; it lies buried in the innermost recess of our own home, that is to say, our own being. And it lies behind the stove, the life-and-warmth giving center of the structure of our existence, our heart of hearts -- if we could only dig." (Heinrich Zimmer)

This book gives readers a plethora of tools to start digging.

Jeff says

While not exactly the most exciting read you're likely to encounter, Zimmer's book on the complex mythology that underlies the art and architecture of India is a very valuable volume for those interested in better understanding Indian culture. So much of Indian art is religious in subject matter, trying to look at it without an understanding of the stories involved is like trying to understand Western religious art with no notion of who Jesus is. If anything, the situation is even more complicated in Indian art, where the gods and goddesses change shape and form with frightening regularity. Vishnu is sometimes Shiva as well, and also turns into Krishna. And the Goddess manifests in innumerable forms. Even the Buddha, in some cases, is seen as an incarnation of Vishnu. Luckily, Zimmer is extremely helpful in sorting out how all these variant incarnations and avatars are related, and the visual forms they take. This is totally old school scholarship, and the book was assembled after Zimmer's death by colleague, based on lecture notes he left behind, so it is not direct or systematic like a text book. But for all that, an indispensable guide to a very complex culture.

Chaney Bicknell says

So far the take on Indian myth (from a person with a thoroughly Western background and perspective) is interesting and valuable. Indian myth is a weak area in my knowledge of world myth as a whole, and this book is a good introduction. Obsessively taking notes as I go, and only reading in my spare time lately, but I don't see myself putting this one down.

Nikki says

Very interesting read. I enjoyed that the text was written by Zimmer but edited by Campbell. Since the study of Hinduism is completely new to me, there was a lot to take in with this text. However, I am fascinated by it all!! The only thing that I didn't like about the text is that the great images of the Indian art are small and in the back of the book and in black and white.

Patricia says

I've read this book several times (four or five at least) over the past years, and each time I walk away sated. The volume of essays was actually compiled/written by one of Zimmer's students, the famous Joseph Campbell, who spent nearly a decade collecting and publishing Zimmer's works posthumously. Zimmer himself was a refugee from Nazi Germany who ended up teaching in the US and passed away in the early 1940s.

This isn't a history of Indian art, but articles about key aspects of Indian religion--the gods and their vehicles, lotus, elephants, the triad of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu, the wheel of rebirth, the Mother Goddess...inspired by the myths alone, although using some sculptures and art works as illustrations. (His apparent 'disinterest' in such forms later was the cause of most of the criticism of his work by later scholars. The great scholar of Indian temple architecture, Stella Kramrisch, noted for example that Zimmer had never even seen a Hindu temple.)

But this isn't why one reads this volume. One reads it for the absolutely wondrous way Zimmer relates these

classic myths of Hinduism. He is the consummate storyteller, as in the tale of the holy man Markandeya, who is described in a creation myth as "wandering inside the god, over the peaceful earth, as an aimless pilgrim, regarding with pleasure the edifying sight of the ideal vision of the world...[until] an accident occurs. In the course of his aimless, unending promenade, the sturdy old man slips, inadvertently out through the mouth of the all-containing god. Vishnu is sleeping with lips a little open; breathing with a deep, sonorous rhythmical sound, in the immense silence of the night of Brahma. And the astonished saint, falling from the sleeper's giant lip, plunges headlong into the cosmic sea." (p. 38)

I can think of no better volume to begin with for those commencing a study of classical Indian art through its myths than this one. In their telling, they reveal the major teachings of Hinduism and each story's meaning as a component of the whole. As explained in the introduction, its "purpose is to fathom the major areas and problems, the dominant symbols and most significant features of the abundant world of Hindu myth". This it does admirably and is the reason why I keep returning.
