

Study of Indian and Southeast Asian Literature to Trace Evolution of Hanuman

Authors : Subramanian Chidambaran

Abstract : Right from the Vedic period, we have instances of human heroes being deified and later even assimilated into other deities. Many scholars opine Indra to be one such Vedic deity who rose from a 'human leader' to the position of Devata. We also see the assimilation of the Vedic deity Rudra into Śiva in post-Vedic period. Thus the current deities and Gods we worship in the polytheistic Hindu system have been a result of many such deifications and assimilations. Hanumān is one such contemporary character in Indian culture that changed from a valiant hero of the Rāmāyaṇa to a prominent deity in present days. There are also many arguments on whether Hanumān was truly a monkey or a human as the term 'vānara' could be interpreted as 'vā narah' i.e. 'or a human'. Despite the popularity of this deity, there is very little academic research done on the genesis and evolution of him. There are many questions that arise - Does Hanumān find any mention (in any form) in literature or archaeological evidence prior to Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa? What is the character of Hanumān in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa? How has this evolved in later Indian literature and where do we see the deification process beginning? What's the character of Hanumān in literature beyond Indian shores such as Southeast Asian literature and how does it compare with those in Indian literature? This paper is an attempt to answer these questions and trace the evolution of the character Hanumān right from the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa to other Indian literature as well as Southeast Asian literature.

Keywords : Hanumān, Indian, Rāmāyaṇa, Southeast Asia

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