

The power of Myth: “Rakthbeej” or Blood-Seed, the Demon

A recount of the myth pervading the region of India and where ever the Veda are read. This is a powerful story, complete with its symbolism and embedded layers of meaning characteristic of all classical myths which ground Human social systems. Its relevance to our lives today is discussed.

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An essay by
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A Myth is essentially a story. A myth is part of the story telling tradition of all cultures. At one level myths merge with story-telling and at another level, myths can be the story themselves. You will see this as we recount this rather intriguing myth of Rakthbeej.

A component to remember about Myth is that you understand it according to your own level of awareness at the time of your reading. As your own awareness grows, and you see further insights, the myth will have deeper meaning. Myths have that quality: that of layers. They are, in a way, 3D. I shall quote Ma Anandamayi Ma, one of my Gurus, who said in a short concise way “ Everyone sees according to his or her light”. She was talking about Spiritual awareness and Consciousness. While this applies to life in general, it applies to story and myth too. Stories, however, are more linear, traveling from one visual area to the next, as one travels from one town to another. Myths, on the other hand, are like poetry, a deep layered experience. They do overlap, just a prose is sometimes poetic and slips into the genre of 'poetic prose. But there is no term for the merger of story and myth. This is something that I question, occasionally. Why is there no term for the merger of story and myth? Possibly, like so many aspects of life, there is no one answer. As answer could be that myth has been kept apart in literature, almost as if the fantasy is so elaborate that most are afraid of it. Few fear poetry, and nobody fears prose, unless its obnoxious or a yellow paper article revealing hidden facts and dangerous secrets. And yet, myths are very powerful they have provided a cultural context throughout human history, giving meaning to life's questions of the world experienced around us. An interpretation of a myth, or a certain aspect of myth will give an insight into an aspect of life, or a solution to a problem, or a deeper understanding so a resolution can be made.

The process of living is complex and traumatic. Myth helps in bearing the trauma, simplifying the complexities, adding to a more cohesive, grounded, balanced perspective to life. Myth is strengthening psychologically and philosophically. Certainly, there are other genres besides story which do that, like the morality plays, for instance. But myth has a certain charm. There is an innocence about it. And there is a suspension of logistic reality. Much like a cartoon character at a certain level. For those familiar with the character of the Coyote he never dies, despite all the attempts of his arch enemy, the Roadrunner. Those cartoons are very simplistic, but they still have the necessary suspension of logistics and reality. Myths do this and much more. Myths take that to a much deeper level. And no, its not a chicken-and-egg conundrum since myth clearly came before cartoons !!

Myths embody core values of a culture. They are not just empty story without meaning or exaggerated flat characters like cartoon. Myths carry a message, through behavior, they give wisdom and morality. Usually this is through symbolism. Wisdom is, after all, a multi-layered quality. And necessarily so.

This is very important. Myth PROTECTS the readers from mental breakdowns. There are examples, specially in the world of philosophy, where deep thinkers will have a mental breakdown in

realizing thought concepts which cannot be processed. Most people, however, are not very deep thinkers, It is more important for them to thought concepts accept according to their level and capacity. In other words, Myth is the more gentle aspect of human communication and the learning of wisdom. A reader can let it go, shrugging it off in laughter or disbelief or 'its just a story'. Later insight will reveal its encapsulated wisdom.

Morality, like freedom, is constantly nurtured. What are the methods society uses to teach these grounded values? Parable, myth, story are some of the techniques. Examples of behavior as a teaching mechanism often fall short since so many of the elders of a society fail in that aspect, sometimes quite dramatically.

In my observation I have noticed the 3 religions of the world extract their parables from their religious texts. However, in the world ruled by Dharm there is no such limitation. Story abound. Imaginary characters gain a real life quality. Myth is rampant, and delightfully so, enriching the weave and texture of society. Wisdom is sprinkled in, along with poetry which lives on many people's lips as they go about their regular life.

A quick note about my reference to the 3 religions. The only 3 religions in this world are the Abrahamic religions. Dharm or Dharma is NOT religion. Dharm has its etymology on the root sound DHA which is the same sound for DHARTI or ground or earth in Sanskrit. Dharm is those qualities which give solidity and grounding in life. People in societies ruled by Dharm treat the characters in the myth as real, living in society, just as a friend or neighbor. It is a very charming quality of Oriental societies.

Myth transcends Time. And Space. And culture. And Space-time, as Stephan Hawkins puts it, allowing one to experience a growth which adds meaning to world around them.

This ability to transcend is most efficiently given by Myth.

What is it that makes a myth last and become a cultural story which all know, and which informs the culture of a society? What gives it that undying life which lives from generations to generations? Its because of the layers. the circles within circles. Oriental thought is excellent with it, especially the Veda, such as the stories of the Mahabharata, with its layers within layers, circles within circles, creating an almost unending story.

These layers and circles overlap with separate stories and concepts within other parts of society. It is my opinion that this is a vital component in giving both feet and wings to a myth so it is grounded as well has the ability to fly, making it transcend space-time transporting itself into a permanence which can only be done with the great skill of what I call 'mob-psychology'. Some stories have to evolve in a group. One person cannot create it.

J.R.R. Tolkien tried to create a myth for 30 years, and it never took, it never found its feet, it never found its wings.. It remained grounded in a story. It could not fly. It was full of fantastical figures, but it is not the fantastical figures which make a myth.

What gives its solid feet and wings? Also Tolkien's people were too far removed from everyday life to be incorporated with any personal message and empowerment. The stories from the Veda, and other Oriental societies have the quality of being personal, empowering, inspirational and yet be somewhat removed. Almost like a gloss.

Human consciousness has many layers. Myth addresses these many layers.

With this in mind let us recount the story of Rakthbeej.. The understanding will happen

later, in your personal lives at your pace .

~2~

Rakthbeej is a demon. His name means Blood-Seed. Rakth is the Sanskrit word for Blood. Beej is the Sanskrit for seed. He was a demon, but the Almighty God Brahman had given him a boon: Whenever a drop of his blood fell to the earth, it would give birth to 1,000 more of him. He was vicious, causing such great damage that he was a destructive force in the world. So finally, the gods decided to kill him. But they could not. Every drop created so more of him. The more they killed him, the

bigger he grew, the more of him were around. Totally bewildered and defeated they rested, unsure about what to do, thinking of everything. Goddess Durga was present. Durga is the goddess of strength. She is seen associated with a lion which is her vehicle. All the gods have vehicles, otherwise how can they communicate and move around ? Hers was this terrifying lion. She thought for a while, and a solution came to her. She told the gods: kill him in the air.

The gods were astounded. They could not understand the plan or purpose. Durga told them: Just kill him in the air, and I will take care of it. Don't worry. Just listen to me. It will work.

The gods agreed.

Now, we know that gods and goddesses have the gift of flight. They could fly as and when they wanted. That was a boon the Almighty God Brahma had given them.

The Gods got Rakthbeej to fly up high and Goddess Durga flew up with them. She took on the form of the fearsome Goddess Kali. She kept herself flying under Rakthbeej. When the Gods killed Rakthbeej, she quickly opened her mouth and spread her tongue wide under Rakthbeej. As he bled the blood fell on her tongue. Durga swallowed the blood, which killed the demon Rakthbeej. This is how the gods and goddess killed the demon.

There is another part of this story with is very relevant: the image of Kali as seen in prints in the near east and all those areas where the Veda are read, taught and practiced. Those images are of the Divine Goddess in her most terrifying and fear-inspiring form.

Here is a description of the image, frozen in time. Kali has her tongue out. The tongue is sticking out hanging down to her chin. It is dripping blood. She is naked. Her body is the color blue for that is the color of the sky. Her hair is open, thick and flowing around her, almost to her knees. Her hair is jet black, for that is the color of the cosmos. Around her neck is a necklace of 24 skeleton head for those are the Sacred Letters, the root sounds of all human language. She has many arms, for that is symbolic of her multi-layered power, each arm symbolic of a specific power. She has a head of the man she has beheaded in some of her hands. The heads are dripping blood. In her other hands she has weapons. All of those weapons are dripping blood. She is standing on the ground. Around her, on the ground are dead men, strewn around in the most gruesome images. Surprisingly, at her feet in front is the image of Shiva, her consort, laying down at her feet, with his eyes shut. In some photo and print images he is on his side, in some on his back. But in all images her one foot is on him.

SHIVA is God. SHIVA, who existed before time, before the beginning of this earth and will exist till the end of time, as long as this cosmos lives. His name SHIVA is symbolic, almost an acronym, definitely poetic. The letter 'I' stands for WOMAN or FEMININE energy. If and when the letter 'I' is removed from the word SHIVA, the word becomes SHVA, which means a dead body. In other words, it is when the Feminine energy is inserted in Masculine energy, the union is complete that the cosmos is created. In effect, we live in Divine Mothers' womb. The entire creation is in Divine Mother's womb.

Understanding the meaning of SHIVA will help in comprehending the various layers of the image of Ma Kali as seen in posters and photographs of the Goddess concept frozen in time.

A quick mention about Divine Mother's womb: that concept is shown in a different

image through sculpture and print, poster images.

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A few notes about the meaning of the myth:

1:

The myth of Rakhtbeej represents a confrontation between order (represented by the gods) and chaos (embodied in the demon). The ultimate triumph of order is achieved through cunning, strategy, and cooperation among the various divine entities, highlighting the interconnectedness and balance within the cosmic energy hierarchy.

2:

Goddess Durga as Kali, a formidable representation of feminine power and strength, underscores how she is instrumental in defeating Rakhtbeej. Her ability to control and contain chaos by consuming the demon's blood exemplifies her protective role and her capacity to harness destructive forces for the betterment of all creation, her children. Her consuming blood is symbolic of consuming life essence and life source.

3.

Shiva's presence underfoot signifies his submission to the divine power of the feminine, while also embodying the idea that even the most potent forces can be tamed or harnessed for the greater good when properly channeled.

4:

The sacred letters around Goddess Kali's neck represent the root sounds of all human languages (the 24 vowels and consonants of Sanskrit), highlighting the interconnectedness of diverse linguistic traditions and the universal nature of these mythologies. This myth talks about the power of language and speech in overcoming chaos, in creating order.

5:

Consuming blood as a representation of the life essence and life source within this myth is valuable and revealing. Destroying the seed has repeated meaning in our psyche. By consuming the life force, be it through blood or other means, this myth demonstrates the power to remove obstacles entirely, to transform and control one's destiny. Here, in this myth, Goddess Kali consuming the life essence and life source of Rakhtbeej through his blood, as well as through the role of language in combating disorder and chaos, removing obstacles, showing the insightful and multifaceted nature of this myth.

7:

This myth transcends Vedic culture. The idea of personal growth, self-improvement, and overcoming adversity, removing obstacles is not exclusive to any single tradition but can be found in all human cultural expressions throughout history. However, this myth of Rakhtbeej has the color and traditions of the specific culture where it was created.

Please know this myth I recount is as I heard it and as it was recounted to me many years ago. It is possible there are aspects and layers I have yet to learn. That exploration and discovery is the quality of a successful myth which has learnt to fly on its own wings of poesy.

About the author:

Narveen Aryaputri has her degrees in English Literature, specializing in 20th C American Literature and in the influence of the Veda on 20th Century American Literature, from Meerut University, India,

She taught English and American Literature at various universities. While there, she experienced both the culture of Iran, as well as the revolt that led to the political change in Iran and the exile of Shah Reza Pahlavi. Narveen emigrated to the United States in January, 1980. She raised her daughter, Manisha Viridi, in the American Midwest. Manisha is now a Dentist and has two lovely children, Nicasio and Zahra.

In September 1990, she re-established The Moline Commercial Club (c. 1895) and the building that housed it (c.1912) in Moline, Illinois. She restored The Spencer House, (c.1865) the oldest historic home in Rock Island, Illinois and the region and the only example of Carpenter Gothic architecture. She then established The Spencer House as a Historic Landmark.

In 1996, she founded The Institute for Cultural and Healing Traditions, Ltd. a not for profit 501©3 corporation, where she is currently the President and Director. Its website is www.qcinstitute.org