

# VERBOS INCENDIUM



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Mythology and the Modern World

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Mythology, particularly in the context of the Indian subcontinent, is a part of our everyday lives. This is true not just for those who belong to particularly religious households but even for those who inhabit urban spaces it is present as allusions, in our everyday speech. When we refer to someone as 'Kumbhakaran' or as 'Vibhishan' we are subtly acknowledging the endless permutations these stories are capable of manifesting themselves into. Mythology is so deeply rooted in the cultural as well as the religious fabric of certain societies that it is impossible to separate them.

Personally, some of my fondest childhood memories are of reading the comic-book version of the tales of Krishna, Shiva, or Savitri during summer break. Going to watch the Ramlila with my cousins was a sacred annual ritual. Each Sunday my family, like many others, would gather together around the T.V for the umpteenth re-telecast of B.R. Chopra's Mahabharat.

But what does mythology mean for the millennials? This issue, 'Mythology and the Modern World' is an attempt to understand mythology from the perspective of our young writers. Since they study classical literature - Indian as well as European- as part of their curriculum they responded quite enthusiastically to the topic and wrote some very insightful and engaging pieces. We have, as always, attempted to cover a

wide range of topics: from interviews and articles to poems and paintings. There is something for everybody.

This issue would not have been possible without the support of our department in-charge, Dr Suprita Jha whose kind words of encouragement inspired us to do our best. I would also like to extend a very special and heartfelt thanks to Ms Kavita Kane who graciously accepted our invitation for an interview and shared with us her views on Indian mythology, her craft, and much more. I would like to thank the dedicated team of student editors who worked with utmost sincerity and infectious enthusiasm to make this issue of the department magazine possible. Lastly, as I always say, this magazine is for the students and by the students; so thanks to all our budding writers, poets and artists for making this endeavour successful.

Happy reading!!

AVANTIKA POKHRIYAL  
(FACULTY EDITOR)

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## Reading the Myth of Sisyphus in the Modern World

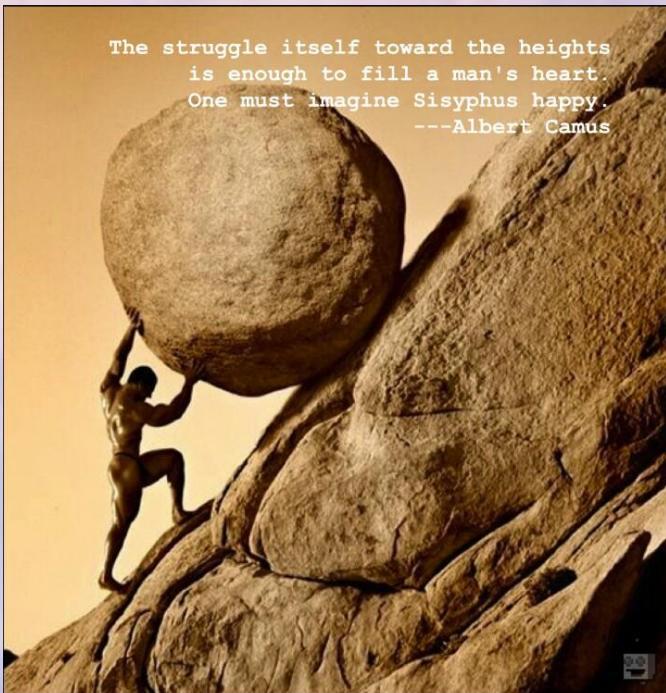
The Greek mythical king Sisyphus and his relationship with the modern world is quite an interesting topic for exploration. There would be no one who is unfamiliar with the name Sisyphus. We have come across it either through direct contact with mythology or through the expressions used in our everyday life where the phrase "Sisyphean" - used to describe tasks that are both endlessly tiresome and futile - is a popular one.

Sisyphus is a mythical character which appears in both of Homer's classics *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It is said that Sisyphus was condemned to eternal punishment in hell for revealing the secret of Zeus, the king of gods, and for repeatedly tricking the gods - even cheating death itself - and trying to slip out of the hold of Zeus' sentence. He loved life dearly and was passionate about living.

But, Sisyphus was condemned to eternally roll a rock to the top of a mountain which would each time roll back down under its own weight. This dreadful penalty would have wrenched out every passion a man has for life. All would agree that Sisyphus would have long been in a state of agitation and would have walked to the doors of death himself if given a chance, but renowned French philosopher Albert Camus (1913-1960) offers us another view. He says, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy". Camus in his 1942 essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus", calls Sisyphus "the absurd hero"

Image: *Repetition and Sisyphus*

The term absurd came up in the late 19th philosophy of 'Existentialism'. Though existentialism is a pretty invention, one can find in a mythical character Sisyphus. The idea of 'Existentialism' came up



essentially century

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philosophical response to the long believed idea of 'Essentialism' which furthered the notion that each human being is born with a purpose given by God. We are all born with an essence which makes us a unique individual but also connects us with other human beings. French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) put forth the idea that it was up to us to figure out our own purpose or essence. This laid the framework for Existentialism. It took away from human lives all pre-determined paths and made us aware that we or our actions lack any inherent meaning, importance or purpose. . It said that God did not create us for a purpose. This idea left us abandoned in a universe full of meaninglessness. 'The Absurd' is one of the fundamental components of 'Existentialism'. Absurdity, according to John Green, a popular American author and educator, refers to the search for answers in an answerless world. Here, we have Sisyphus exerting his whole being into accomplishment of nothing, his never-ending task of rolling the boulder up

and down does not have any meaning- thus he becomes the perfect representative of 'the absurd' .

Another quality that wins Sisyphus the title of the Existential hero is that "[he] is as much through his passions as through his tortures (pg 76)." Camus says that it is the "hour of consciousness" which interests him the most in the myth of Sisyphus. He describes that it is during the pause or his return down the mountain to roll up the boulder back again to the summit that he makes a difference. Sisyphus, though he knows the futility or the meaninglessness of his labour, still goes on or rather chooses doing it again and yet again. Thus he is involved in the process of giving his own meaning to a meaningless world. Existentialism does not deter us from creating our own meaning, it negates the presence of all pre-determined, inherent meaning from this universe. Absence of a larger meaning means that we can create one ourselves. Camus says:

One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. The universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile...the struggle itself to the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.

(pg 78)

Thus, Sisyphus rebels against the vengeful gods who try to render his life meaningless. Sisyphus does not conform to the intention of gods to torture him. He never considers that his actions lead to nothing, instead he finds fulfillment in the task itself. He is a hero

in the sense that he does not allow the others' interpretation of his life as futile to seep into his mind.

The idea of fate also supports the crowning of Sisyphus as the existential hero. Sartre explored the most agonizing aspect of existentialism - the absence of an authority, which means that in the lack of any guidelines, we are the ones who have to design our own moral code. Sartre argues that one should live "authentically", by which he means that one should accept the full weight of freedom in the light of the absurd. Sisyphus is one such man. He never surrenders to the fate written down for him by the gods. He is actively involved in scripting the course of his life. We can say that he chooses the punishment through "his scorn for gods, his hatred of death, and passion for life." He submits neither to Zeus, Thanatos, or Hades. He tricks each one of them due to his hunger for life and living. He does not seem to have any kind of reverence for them rather, he scorns them. Camus says, "There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn." He adds that Sisyphus "makes fate a human matter which means that it should be settled among men (pg 78)." Thus we can say that Sisyphus creates his own fate by defying authority, he makes it personal. Sartre seems to theorize on this very idea of making choices; creating a personal system of values and making authentic choices based on those values. He does not readily accept death when it comes for him rather, he evades it and lives his life on his own terms and later undergoes the penalty for disobedience. It is his acceptance that, his own choices lead to the consequences he is in, which keeps Sisyphus from despairing.

Thus Sisyphus' discarding of a higher destiny, his abandonment in a meaningless world and his creation of his own meaning in it makes him a hero in its full existential sense. With the example of Sisyphus, we realise that myths have the potential to endlessly reproduce themselves through times and spaces.

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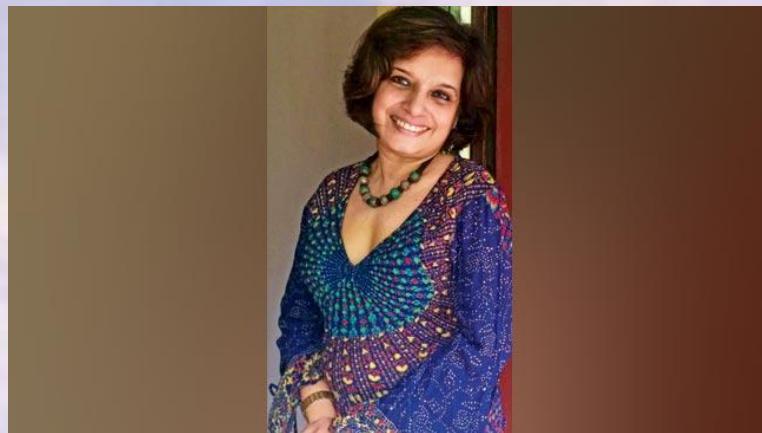
**-VARSHA ANIL NAIR**

**III YEAR**

## **A Colloquy with Kavita Kané**

Kavita Kané is an Indian writer known for writing Mythological fiction. All of her books are based on various characters borrowed from the vast canvas of Indian mythology. She

is known to be an author of the new era of, what is known as, Retel. Her bestselling novel *Karna's wife: the Outcast Queen* was published in 2014. She grew up in Patna, Delhi, and Pune with her parents and two sisters. In a candid conversation with the student editors of *VERBOS INCENDIUM* she shares that her best companion during those golden years of childhood were not people but books. Ms. Kane also admits to being a die-hard aficionado of cinema and theatre.



*Following is the exchange that took place between the student editors of VERBOS INCENDIUM, the e-journal of the department of English and the writer over e-mail:*

**Q. A**S a writer, how do you identify the potential for a good story in characters? What

other considerations do you have in mind when picking up a project?

**A.** The essential part is about storytelling. My books are based on stories from the epics

and the Puranas- stories already been told and familiar with. It is not about just retelling them. By seeing them through a different perspective-namely through minor or marginalised characters- adds a different dimension, a changed perspective where the narrative changes though the plot remains the same.

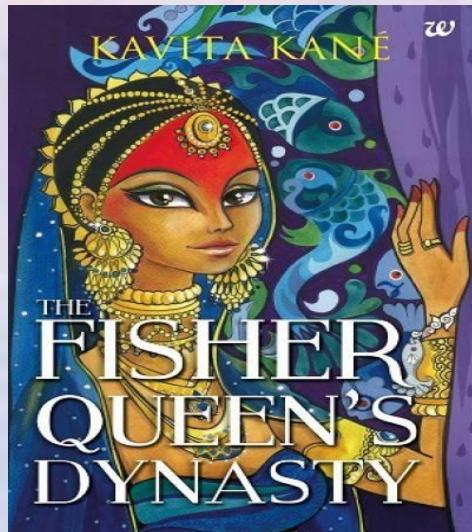
**Q.** Don't you think that our society today is in desperate need of strong and independent female role models? Which mythological character could be that guiding light, according to you? Would you like to name a woman, a public figure or otherwise, from the modern world in whom you find these characteristics?

**A.** All the women characters in our mythology are strong, tough individuals of convictions who, given their situation and limitations, never give up and fight their battle of life. If Draupadi was strong, so were Satyavati and Kunti. As was Sita and Mandodari, Tara and Kaikeyi. Likewise, we see so many women around us but fail to notice how strong and brave they are, fighting their daily battles. As for role models - we have so many. Hima Das, the Phogat sisters are our most recent shining stars to be emulated.

**Q.** You have a flair for viewing epics from a hitherto unexplored character's point of view, a fact you have proven right from the very beginning, with *Karna's Wife*-your debut novel. Choosing a figure that has no significant historical backdrop or a major

role in the storyline of the epic, does it give you certain autonomy to explore the character in ways you prefer? Or, is it restricting, given that the character has no significant purpose in the lore? Generally, what are the struggles you experience while writing from the view of such unfamiliar and little known female mythical figures?

A. Since they are minor characters, the most difficult aspect is that there is not much material and information about them which forces me to flesh out their skeletal frame through the events and the big characters around them. for instance Satyavati of *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* was molded largely through the huge character of Bhishma. As was Urmila through Sita and Lakshman in *Sita's Sister*. Besides which, juggling between these flimsy facts and fiction is often tricky.



(The book *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* by Kavita Kané captures the dilemma of the fisher-girl Satyawati who goes on to become a queen.)

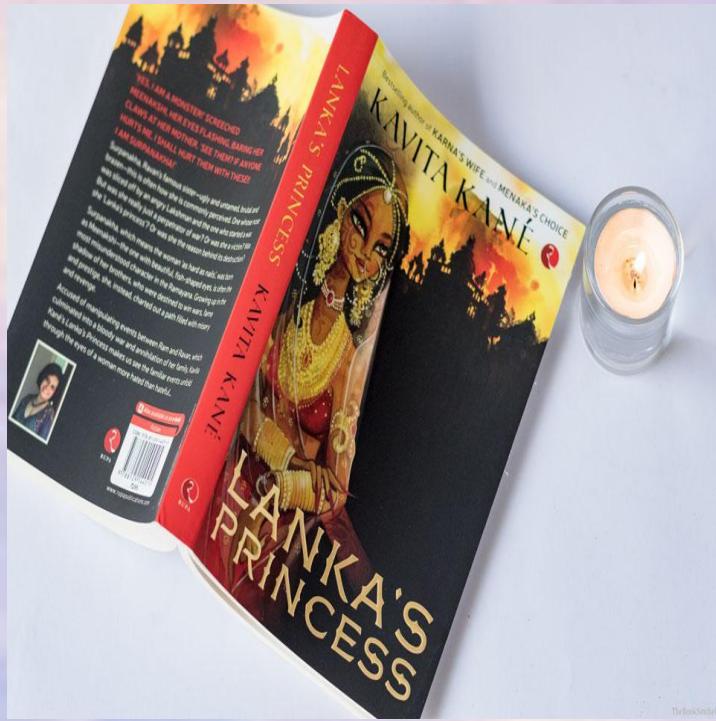
**Q.** Popular imagination tends to portray women as either black or white - 'the angel' or 'the monster'. This stereotypical and sexist depiction often percolates into our understanding of women in our myths. By giving a voice and agency to the negative female figures through your works, such as Lanka's Princess, do you aim to eliminate such rigid binaries, or is it an effort to make readers empathize with those who have been misrepresented through the ages?

**A.** Mythology itself became a victim of patriarchy and characters got stereotyped into extremes but when it comes to gender roles, Hindu mythology is much more complex. In portraying Surpanakha I had no intention of blanching a dark character, I was interested in the greys. I was hoping to humanise a demonised character. She is neither a vamp nor a victim, but rather a woman whose story needs to be told as she is the trigger point of the war between Ram and Ravan, the reason for the second half of the *Ramayana*, and the one who propels the plot forward. Stereotyping is not just myopic, it is highly prejudiced too. Telling the story and showing the character without bias, without bracketing them into 'good or 'bad' frees preconceived notions about them which I tried to delve through my protagonists like Menaka, Surpanaka and the recently, Satyavati.

**Q.** Women in mythology are often accused of being catalysts to the tumultuous and catastrophic events that follow. Don't you think such a representation makes it difficult

for a woman of today to look up to these mythical heroines and relate to them? Does the fact that the authors of all our mythological stories are males have anything to do with such an inadequate representation of women? Is therefore, a woman's intervention necessary to humanize not just the witches but also the goddesses?

**A.** Mythology has always been seen through the men's stories, rarely through a woman's eyes. If we see each of the women in their layered identity, we would not be able to see them not in their confined to their conventional images or as oversimplified embodiments be it Sita or Surpankaha. Trapping these characters into misogynic, stereotypical denotations the narrative takes on a parochial bias, viewed with prejudice and discrimination. Goddesses, apsaras, she-demons are but all shades of human nature. Mythology is not about gods but about Man his follies and faults and flaws, that's why the stories and the characters have to be humanised.



(*Lanka's Princess* that attempts to humanise the demonic Surpanakha)

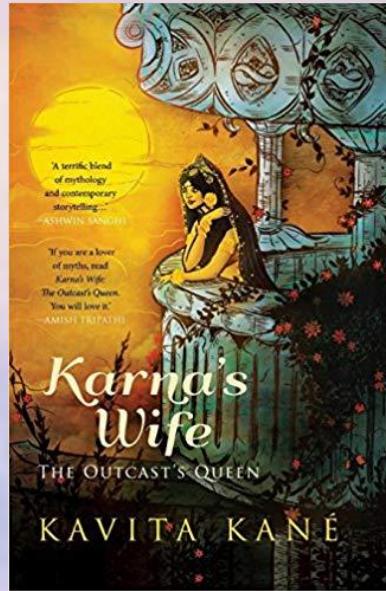
**Q.** In the face of the contemporary political propaganda, and the culture of brutally silencing dissent, how much room do you see for challenging the established discourse? Especially, given that mythology is very deeply intertwined with religion in our society.

**A.** Mythology and literature have always been interrelated, where mythology almost works as a literary devise, a canvas to portray thoughts, beliefs and philosophy. Most of our regional literature is heavily based on the epics and the Puranas. And Hindu mythology goes deeper - these are not just old tales of kings and gods but stories with strong socio-political and philosophical overtones which are meant to make you think and not judge.

The fact that we see different narratives - the feminist, the subaltern, the anti-hero - all based on mythology shows that we are open to different readings and perspectives on the subject. And please don't under-estimate the reader - he is mature and discerning and knows the difference between, fact and fiction and false and fake.

**Q.** Do you think, in the future, tales such as yours might become the primary sources of understanding mythology by children? What kind of an impact would such a counter-discourse have on them? Should we also consider the possibility of radical interrogation of religious structures of our society, akin to that of western civilization in late 18th or early 19th century when people lost faith in almost all established.

**A.** I hope my books evoke enough interest for the readers to read the original texts [too]. We are fortunate to have a mythology that's so dynamic and palatable and 'living' we see it all around us - in our performing arts, literature, music, art and architecture - and now even in serials as well! Stories from the epics have been told and retold for a thousand years, and they will continue to provide food for thought for more literature to come.



(*Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* tells the extraordinary story of Karna, the unsung hero of the Mahabharata, through the eyes of his wife Uruvi)

**Q.** In your latest novel, there is focus on Satyavati's life; you show how she learns to live amidst the atmosphere of political intrigue in Hastinapur by becoming ruthless herself. Her actions and ambitions lead to her estrangement from the people around her. Is this a parallel to the modern world where ambitious women are questioned and misjudged? Do you think the society will ever be able to completely accept them without any aversion?

**A.** It's funny a woman is called ruthless when it comes to ambition - a man is not. Such double standards still exist. Actually I wanted to show that power is egalitarian - it knows no gender. It can corrupt both a man and a woman. Satyavati in her journey from victim to victor, uses power the same way as her offenders had done. She is no

different from a man or alternatively, she is a woman who does not change rules but becomes a part of the system herself. The aversion to a woman in power, stems more from resentment than reasoning - it is the motive and manner and means that needs to be accounted, be it a man or a woman.

**Q.** What is a day in the life of a writer like? Do you sometimes miss the hustle and bustle of your previous job?

**A.** No, not at all! The best part is all those calls have ceased and my phone has stopped jangling! And that I can write when and what I want.

**Q.** Some of our fellow students want to pursue writing as a career. A few, in fact, have already begun exploring that path. What insiders tip would you like to give these aspiring writers of ours?

**A.** To tell - and write a story well. And to read - a lot.

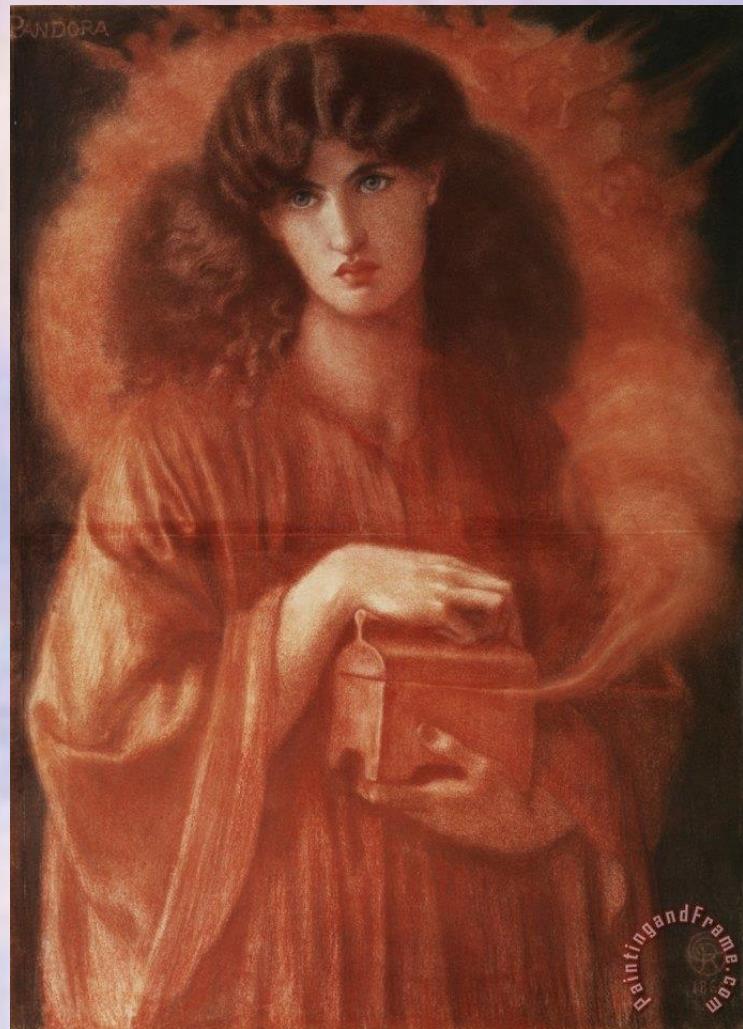
## THE MYTH OF PANDORA'S BOX: IS CURIOSITY MANKIND'S DOWNFALL?

“Curiouser and Curiouser”<sup>1</sup>, cried Alice as she ventured further into the Wonderland she thought was a figment of her imagination. The readers of Carroll’s *Alice* demonstrate a keen sense of inquisitiveness, very much like the protagonist of the novel, as they follow her into the land of wonders where she her encounters peculiar characters and bizarre events. But while little Alice’s unusual escapades enlighten her mind and develop her personality as an individual, chances are, one might not come across similar edifying adventures in their everyday life, and instead find themselves in a perilous state of affairs.

Throughout the ages, man’s innate curiosity has been treated simultaneously with awe and suspicion. The phrase ‘curiosity killed the cat’ effectively underlines the tenuous relationship between man and his natural inquisitiveness. Though today curiosity is seen largely in a positive light, there exists a distinct tradition where curiosity is considered a vice, and even a sin. Great Christian thinkers like St. Augustine wrote in *Confessions*, AD 397, that in the aeons before creating heaven and earth, God "fashioned hell for the inquisitive". If one were to trace the genesis of this tension, they might come across the infamous myth of PANDORA’S BOX.

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<sup>1</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll



(*Pandora* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti)

The myth has now become a metaphor and is used to refer to endless complications or troubles arising from man's unbridled curiosity. It comes to us from ancient Greek mythology, specifically a set of epic poems by **Hesiod**, called the *Theogony and Works and Days*. Written during the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC, these poems relate how the gods came to create Pandora and how the gift Zeus gave her ultimately led to the end of what Hesiod referred to as the *Golden Age of Humankind*.

According to Greek Mythology, the two Titan brothers- Prometheus and Epimetheus- helped Zeus win a divine war against the gods, and as a reward for their loyalty, Zeus gave the two the task of creating the first creatures that would come to inhabit the Earth. Epimetheus had to bring into being the animals, to which he gave all the gifts of skills and protection, leaving Prometheus with nothing to give to his creation- the human beings. And so to make man as autonomous as the gods, Prometheus stole *fire* from Zeus himself and gave it to mankind as a means of survival and protection. Angered by the defiance, Zeus punished Prometheus by tying him to a rock and letting an eagle feast upon his liver, which would magically grow back the very next morning, only to be feasted upon by the eagle again. But this excruciating torture wasn't enough for the fuming God, who believed that humankind was equally to be blamed. And therefore, Zeus had Pandora made as a retribution for such insolence. He asked Hephaestus to mould Pandora- the first human woman- out of the earth, shaping her perfectly. All the Gods poured their gifts onto her which were beautifully evil. Athena dressed her in silvery clothing and taught her weaving; Aphrodite bestowed grace on her head and desire and cares to weaken her limbs, and Hephaestus himself crowned her with a marvelous golden diadem of animals and sea creatures. Therefore, her name Pandora, which in Greek means "she who gives all gifts" or "she who was given all the gifts" aptly, fits. Zeus thus sent this beautiful treachery to earth to be wedded to Epimetheus, who accepted her despite his brother's warnings. As a wedding present, Zeus gave Pandora a box (though originally it was a jar), warning her never to open the box unless the gods decreed it. But Pandora, who was made to be curious, succumbed to the ill-fated

providence and lifted the lid. Out of the box flew every trouble known to humanity- strife, sickness, toil and myriad others. Pandora managed to keep one spirit in the box named Elpis, usually translated as 'hope'.

Initially an origin-myth (describing the origin of mankind), the tale was used by the ancient Greeks as a code of conduct and a cautionary tale to not yield to human weaknesses. Pandora's uncontrollable inquisitiveness ultimately led to the end of all that's good, and the beginning of misery and destitution. The myth, thus dictates that curiosity is a trait in mankind that can most easily be, and most often is, the cause of their downfall.



(*Landscape with the fall of Icarus* by Peter Bruegel the Elder)

Another popular myth one seems to recount when talking about curiosity being man's ruin, is the myth of **Icarus**- the one who flew too close to the sun. The story of Icarus narrates his escape from Crete with the help of his crafty inventor father **Daedalus**. It is a story that is often attributed to the Roman poet **Ovid** in his magnum opus *Metamorphoses*. The tale of **Icarus** is one of those legends of **Greek mythology** that fascinates audiences especially because of the character's desire to go beyond human boundaries as well as for the tragic consequences this brought about. His transgression and over-reaching attitude because of his curious nature is what eventually brought his end. The myth, therefore, warns against the needless search for instant gratification, and for overstepping the clearly demarcated boundaries that have been set to keep the world in balance.

One can even find references to curiosity being considered as the *original sin* of transgression in the Book of Genesis. "*Those who engage in this fantasy*", says St.Thomas Aquinas, "*think they are doing something great, if with surpassing curiosity and keenness they explore the whole mass of this body which we call the world; so great a pride is thus begotten, that one would think they dwelt in the very heavens about which they argue*". The religious conventions thus condemned curiosity, for it led him astray from the study and worship of God, thus away from light.

All these myths and legends effectively instructed mankind to inhabit the liminal space of equilibrium in order to keep the social order intact. They conditioned their

readers to not be curious about what lies beyond the visible realm. But eventually, as the times changed, so did mankind's allegiance to religious scriptures that served as a check on man's insatiable curiosity. The late modern societies turned this desire to attain the 'forbidden' knowledge into an arranged way of life, following the inquiry as far as it goes and leaving no stone unturned. There is always more to know, and the more, the better



Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus* alludes to the same act of transgression and disobedience that has haunted man since antiquity. The central thematic concern of the text that piques the interest of its critics is its treatment of curiosity. Victor Frankenstein, in his attempt to transform society and bring glory to himself through a revolutionary scientific expedition, ends up enacting the most profound form of blasphemy- equating his capabilities to that of God Himself. Using his scientific knowledge and speculative experimentation, Victor dabbles into the realm of life and death itself, which is off limits to humanity, thus disrupting the natural order of things. He aspires to do something miraculous, but his over-reaching vision to usurp God leads

him to bring to life a 'monster'. Victor's creation of the creature is akin to Pandora's act of opening the wretched box, and just as the box unleashes evil onto mankind, Frankenstein's monster too plagues the life of everyone in the novel, including its creator.

**Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.<sup>2</sup>**

In saying this, Victor at last realizes the error of his ways, and asks mankind to 'learn from his wrongdoings'. His fascination with the abomination brings misery in place of glory, grief instead of elation, and ultimately, death instead of life. The end of this character is aptly justified for it acts as a modern day gospel, reminding man of his capabilities and his limitations.

Therefore, whether in the form of a myth or in literature, or whether as a vice or a virtue, it would be partial of one to concur with one aspect of curiosity and not the other. If our myths dictate us to contain this sinful facet of our nature, literature, on the other hand, liberates mankind of the prejudice and provides it with the academic freedom to achieve all that which used to be unthinkable. But then again, it is imperative for man to know his boundaries so as to uphold the natural harmony of the world. So, in the most simplest of terms, curiosity acts both as a curse, and as a blessing for the humankind.

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<sup>2</sup> *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley

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**HARJAS KAUR**

**III YEAR**

## **FACT FILE: AFRICAN AND JAPANESE MYTHS**

Mythology, commonly means, a traditional story or narrative that embodies the belief or beliefs of a group of people. During the primitive times, among the first of human beings myths emerged so as to explain scientific and natural phenomenon which were beyond their understandings, like associating fire and thunder with powerful other worldly creatures. Different variations of myths have been adopted by various distinct religious. Here, I have focused on African and Japanese myths and legend to draw parallel between them. Among them, there are many similarities which interlink many legends and myths. This has led scholars to believe that they have all originated from a single myth.

### **• Creation of World according to African Mythology**

Africa is prominent for its rich biodiversity and its culture. But not many of know about their beliefs and folklores. The Yoruba is an ethnic group of southwestern and north central Nigeria and Benin.

According to Yoruba mythology, the world was created from marshy and watery wasteland by a supreme god Obatala, who lived in the sky with other gods. These gods sometimes descended to marshy wasteland on spider-webs, in their idle time. One day, Olodumare (the name given to one of the three namifestations of the supreme god in Yoruba mythology), like Zeus, instructed Orisha-nla (the great God Obatala, Olodumare's second son also known as The Sky Father) to create a solid land in the marshy land below. He gave a hen, a pigeon, and the shell of a snail containing some

loose earth, to Orisha. Orisha then descended and threw the loose earth into a small space. Then he left the hen and the pigeon to run around so they can scratch and move the earth around. Soon they covered a large area and created a solid ground. Olorun, after getting the news, sent a Chameleon to inspect the work. The creature discovered a wide and dry land which was called lfe (meaning "wide") and lle (meaning "house"). All creatures later evolved from this lfe-lle and it was revered forever as a sacred spot.

In Yoruba mythology, there are tales of Shango, who is considered as the God of Thunder just like we have Thor, the God of Lightening in Norse Mythology. Historically, he was the fourth king of Oyo Empire of Yorubaland. In art, Shango is depicted with a double-axe on his three heads.

- **The Creation of World (*Kuniumi*) according to Japan Mythology**

According to this legend, after the creation of Heaven and Earth the five elder gods named Kotoamatsukami delegated the two youngest lone deities, Izanagi and Izanami, to give solid form to Earth. They used a precious stone covered spear called Ame-no-nuboku given to them by elders, which they used to churn the chaotic mass on Earth. When drops of salty water dropped from the spear, the first island was formed, Onorogoshima. The formation of Japan started with the procreation of eight large islands by Izanagi and Izanami. In Japanese mythology these islands make up the known world.

There is similarity in the legends of creation of the world here. In both African and Japanese mythology the elder god has ordered a younger generation to take on the task of creating the world and have given them some tools to accomplish that task. Those tools are the reason of controlling the chaos on the Earth and giving it a more stable environment for life to prosper on it.

### • **The Queen of Sheba**

Then there are some figures which have been mentioned in other holy texts. The Queen of Sheba is mentioned in not one but two holy books- the Bible and the Koran. She was the ruler of Sheba, in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, an ancient kingdom which modern archeology speculates was located in present day Yemen or Ethiopia. In Bible she is called Makeda but she is also referred to as Bilqis, Nicaula, Bilkis in other texts. She is said to have undertaken a difficult journey to Jerusalem, to meet the great King Solomon. Makeda and King Solomon were equally impressed with each other. They had a son Menelik I, according to the Ethiopian Book of Glory of Kings. The story of the African Queen of Sheba is deeply cherished in Ethiopia as part of the national heritage.

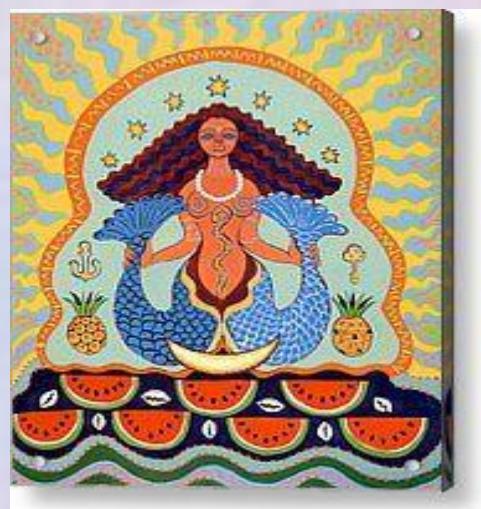
To conclude, mention of one icon in more than one religion points to the fact that all the mythologies around the world might have originated from one common legend. As population grew, various religions emerged and every culture adopted their own version of that myth.



A depiction of the Queen of Sheba

### • The Alluring Aicha Kandicha

Aicha Kandicha is a female mythological figure in Moroccan folklore. She is depicted as a beautiful young woman who has the legs of a hooved animal like a goat or camel and is believed to reside near water sources. She is considered to seduce local young men with her beauty and then madden or kill them. She has mentions in the Islamic traditions about her licentious nature. She has many similarities with Succubus or a Siren who are also famous for luring men and driving them crazy.



An Imaginary Depiction of Aicha Kandicha

## • The Magnificent Dragons

Chinese dragons are the mythical creatures in Chinese mythology, Chinese folklore and in East Asian culture at large. It is usually depicted as a snake-like creature having four legs. They are believed to control water, rainfall, typhoons and floods. They also symbolize strong auspicious powers. During the days of Imperial China, the Emperor of China usually used dragon as a symbol of his Imperial power and strength.

The *Mizuchi* is a type of a Japanese dragon or legendary serpent like creature who is believed to control water. Many people perceive it to have been a water deity. Mizuchi is also a Japanese transliteration for several types of Chinese dragon.

There are also mention of dragons in Korean, Thai, Napalese folklores and Philippine mythology. It is also speculated that they share many similarities with Nagas who are large snake like creature who can shape-shift themselves into Humans by will, in Hindu and Buddhism mythology.



6th Century Naga at Badami Cave Temple and a Chinese Dragon at the wall of Haikou Yazhou Gu Cheng, Hainan, China

## • The Giant Catfish

In Japanese mythology, the Namazu or Onamazu is a giant catfish who is believed to cause earthquakes. In folklore, it is speculated to reside in mud under the Japanese islands and is controlled by god Kashimawho with a stone. When Kashima lets its guard down, Namazu gets out of control and causes earthquakes. It is believed by ancient people that catfish are sensitive to earthquakes and can sense it even before the disaster strikes.

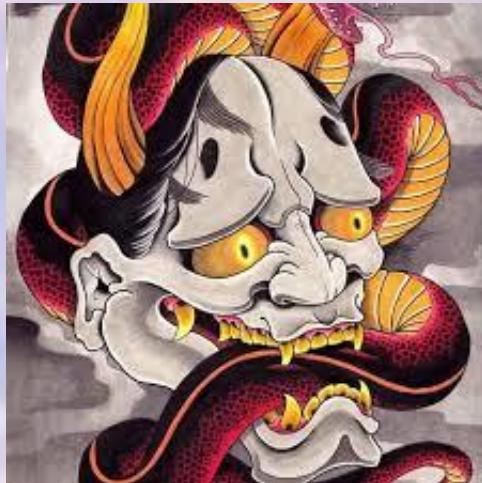


Illustration of the myth related to the Gaint Catfish

## • The Supernatural Shinigami

In Japanese mythology, the most infamous is the figure of Shinigami, who are the 'Gods of Death' or supernatural spirits. They are believed to lure humans to death and the dark world by appealing to their aspirations and desires. Shinigami are described as monsters, spirits, and creatures of darkness, fallen angels and sometimes, death itself. This concept shares many similarities with demons, evil spirits and creatures like Lucifer, Mephistopheles from the Greek Mythology.

In Buddhist Mythology, there is the figure of *Mara* who is concerned with death. They are believed to possess and make humans commit suicide so it is sometimes explained to be Shinigami. Shinigami has been made famous by anime like 'Death Note' which was widely popular in Japan and recently was also adapted into a movie.



An imaginary depiction of Shinigami

### • Comparative Mythology

There are many resemblances in mythical tales and folklores from divergent cultures present in different parts of the globe. Scientists studies these similarities and dissimilarities between mythologies of different religion so as to come to a single conclusion regarding the beliefs of death, life, creation of the world and other such prevalent themes. This field of study is known as Comparative Mythology. It provides a distinct insight on the development of various religions and cultures. It can also help in tracing out the evolution of human beings plus different societies throughout the history and the way their religion shaped and influenced them.

For instance, research done by linguists has shown that there are linguistic similarities in the name of some gods from distinct myths who shares the same characteristics: "The Greek sky-god Zeus Pater, The Roman sky god Jupiter and the Vedic sky god Dyaus Pitr have same linguistically identical names." <sup>3</sup>

In addition, scholars have repeatedly proved that the main concept of death, heaven and hell is also similar as they all agree that people, who have lived a purposeful life, enjoy their afterlife but the people who have hurt others, suffer in their afterlife.

**-SONALI**

**II YEAR**

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative\\_mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparative_mythology)

## Ragnarok : The Final Destiny of Gods

(A poem based on Norse mythology)

The fimbul winter reigns.  
Darkness fills the air,  
like ashes, like mist.

Flames eating at our lies,  
the wolves have started engulfing the skies.

It's finally  
the beginning of the end.

Surtr's sword eliminating the sun,  
Bifrost, charcoaled, stands overrun.

The betrayer Loki, escapes.  
The god of mischief, owning up  
to his name.

Yggdrasil flutters,  
as the gods rush past.  
Hell empties,  
as Asgard perishes.  
Valhalla is merry no more.  
Odin and Thor  
and Frey and Tyr  
die valiantly in battle.

Mortally wounded,  
Loki lays, alongside  
the ill-fated Heimdall.

Gleaming with pride,  
"I won", he says.

Amused, Heimdall  
recites, the glory  
of Vidar and Vali  
and Magni and Modi  
and of the mighty Mjollnir.

He recites, of  
Life and Life's Yearning  
hidden in the  
eternal world tree.  
All unconquered and alive.

"You have failed", amused,  
he says, "You have failed."

There's no beginning and  
there's no end.

It's just the  
end of the old times and  
the beginning of the new.

The oceans covering  
the dead and the fallen.  
Waiting,  
for the world to rise again.

Waiting,  
for Heimdall to blow his horn again.

Waiting,  
for Asgard and Midgard to thrive, again.

Waiting,  
For another Ragnarok to empower them, again.

~NANDINI DOGRA

I YEAR

## Reading Ovid in Post-Modern Times

Born in 43BC, Ovid enjoyed an entirely Roman linguistic and cultural environment. Marked early for a political career, he showed little inclination towards it and went on, later, to say that poetry flowed from his lips of its own accord.<sup>1</sup> He was acutely conscious of the rituals, power structures, politics, and societal norms of his day- a fact that is perceptible in his works. Further, the political atmosphere of Augustan Rome provided him the peace and stability that it denied to his predecessors, namely Virgil, Horace, and Propertius. As a result, Ovid's work is marked by "insouciance"<sup>2</sup>, a casual nonchalance.

This paper will discuss his *Metamorphoses* to analyse his employment of myths, but with a post-modernist reading. In our post-modern world, we have done away with theories of categorisation, of rigidity, in order to see the world as it really is- in a flux. It has also led to an emphasis on our subjectivity, preceded by the breakdown of historical grand narratives. Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses* does precisely this. *Metamorphoses* is but a collection of Greek myths and Latin folklore, as viewed and understood by Ovid. Even in his *Ars Amatoria*, he writes about old myths seen in a new context. In *Metamorphoses*, he presents his own version of time alongside displaying scepticism of truth being one. He begins with the formation of the world, includes as many myths as he wishes to, in the order that he wishes to ascribe to them, includes the apotheosis of Julius Caesar and hence, ends with the presentation of the world in his own day, in his own way. One single narrative of his deals with times as ancient as the Four Ages (Golden, Silver, Bronze, Iron) and times as recent as Augustan Rome. There is a huge temporal shift therein. What about

those who don't see time as such? Many might have a different understanding of it. Further, there are changes in pace throughout the books. He discusses the stories of Medea and Perseus at length, ignores some others while "passing over others briefly"<sup>3</sup>. The daughters of Minyas casually allude to a variety of stories, irrespective of its relevance in the larger tale. This expresses liberty and freedom of choice at Ovid's end. He has his own idea of chronology that he shares with us. There is a conflation of past, present, future: Ovid borrows and reflects upon the myths from *past* in *present* and goes on to prophesise that the progeny would remember his work in the *future*. Taking the argument further, can it indicate timelessness in his work?

The only binding unit of these tales is the act of transformation. There are no real links between the various tales that he incorporates within one large text and yet, all of it seems to be organically coming together. It "reinforces the Ovidian theme of the very contingency of connectedness"<sup>4</sup>. Herein lies, the mark of a true genius. His ingenuity in creating an "illusion of unity", a "semblance of cohesion"<sup>5</sup> is commendable. It highlights fluidity of narrative style. Further, Ovid veritably plays around with the idea of hybridity as far as the genre of his book is concerned. Though it is considered to be an epic by many, it flouts most of its features: no inherent unity of action in the narrative; less of heroism and more of love and sex is included; instead of platonic love, sexual love takes precedence; gods are susceptible to human frailties and aren't noble righteous beings. So, it clings to some generic requirements while deviating from others. On a larger level, *Metamorphoses* comprises characteristics of various genres: epic poetry, folklore,

panegyric, legend and mythology, adventure, comedy, elegy, tragedy, pastoral, philosophy etc. Not adhering to a strict mode of writing, he exploits the opportunity of reformulating a mixture of various models, depicting flexibility. Can this also have political ramifications? Is this tolerance to be contrasted with the stability (and hence, rigidity) that Augustus tried to impose?

The tales included in *Metamorphoses* quintessentially represent “chaos changed into ordered harmony”<sup>6</sup>. But what really is harmony, is what one must question. And how far can one go in labelling the tales as harmonious when their respective ends involve death of a character, annihilation of a group, a revenge etc.? It makes one ponder over the question of harmony in society vs. harmonious individual. In *Bacchus* (Book III), the sailors are all turned into dolphins, ripped of their ability to speak by an all powerful Bacchus. In the same story, Pentheus’ aunts and mother cut off his limbs. Is this harmony? I think it will be right to question if Ovid is making a political point here. Could he be referring to the peace brought by Augustus, where an underlying anxiety of return to chaos existed? Ovid could have personally felt it to be true, for he was banished to Tomis on the Black Sea for having written *Amores* and for being involved in a scandal concerning the royal family.

Ovid’s very idea of writing a continuous tale falls in line with a post-modernist narrative. He toys with the idea of categories. On the one hand, the stories are interwoven by Ovid in a seamless manner. He appears to distrust boundaries here and finely spins varied tales, making invisible the disjunctive attribute thereof<sup>7</sup>. On the other

hand, individuals in tales change forms, which delineates his belief in categorisation because that's precisely what allows for such transformations to take place. Moreover, change from one category to another

can be liberation in this poem, or a claustrophobic nightmare; it can be banal, or sublime, a realization of a person's possibilities or a savage reduction, sometimes an apparent appendage with no evident link or motive ... As one human character after another transgresses into different categories of the animate and inanimate, the poet charts the bizarre mixture of convention and nature that cumulatively works to establish what we take to be normal for humans<sup>8</sup>.

It refers to a number of choices available to Ovid. On a deeper level, it brings attention to Ovid's technique of making so many options available to him. The underlying theme of transgression in some stories brings us back to the availability of alternatives, which is one of the many hallmarks of post modernism discussed here. Defying normativity, it allows space for re-thinking and a new course of action. We hardly find any dismissal in Ovid. In *Metamorphoses*, he displays an acknowledgement and, further, acceptance of human nature and behaviour. Love, fear, passion, jealousy, pity- are all validated by Ovid has honest expressions. He allows his humans and gods to be as human as they wish to be, without expecting them to fulfil strict standardised roles.

**-PRASHANSHA LUTHRA**

**III YEAR**

## **HADES AND PERSEPHONE**

(And) he took me to the underworld

On his chariot of horses black,

Carrying me to his onyx throne

His face shone against the night black

His solemn hands holding me tender

He placed the garden under my feet

Oh mother! He is not cruel like you said

His eyes are warm and tongue tastes sweet

Mother, why did you separate us?

If you really cared, you would have let me stay

And Hades, you trusted the fruit over me

Believe me, my love

I would have come back to you anyway

**-DEEKSHA BHARDWAJ**

**(B.EL.ED)**

**J.C. THE OCCULT DETECTIVE**



-SHRUTI

II YEAR

## MYTHS AND MODERNITY

From swords to guns

Shots and clanks

Lord Rama, now sons,

The myths do speak

In present tongues!

From Draupadi being a victim of patriarchy

To Meera being condemned by the same society

Women have been rendered weak in mythology

No matter how many powers they possessed

From the exceptional to the ordinary

The connection is the same

Attached to the body

The spirits do remain!

Be it the Gods of Athens

or modern day Satans

They follow the same pattern

These myths do not dissolve  
As the modern world evolves  
The earth might revolve  
But the sun just stands along!

From Hanuman to Constantine  
And Lord Rama to Zeus  
Though myths may sound vile  
They still are very much alive.

**-GURSANJAM KAUR**

**I YEAR**

## **BORN TO BURN**

I am a queen, kissed by the fire,

Egressed out of the holy pyre!

My life, betted upon and then pawned,

By the kings who were themselves bygone!

Attempted to be disrobed in the assembly full of learned men,

Instead I was sheltered by the Lord himself!

Wedded to one, distributed among many,

You think I had power? Not any!

As I, the incarnation of Durga did emanate,

Bestowed upon the Kauravas their deserved fate!

Desired by the world, deserved by none,

By now the battle of Mahabharata had begun!

Alas! What downfall did the brothers face,

To restore the honour of the Kuru race!

Once I thought,

Do I, who faithfully served all,

Deserved to fall?

Then on, I deserted each, held onto the One (Krishna)

Who fought for me, sparing none!

Yes, I say, never underestimate the fervor of a woman, for she is a goddess,

At times mortifying, benevolent nonetheless!!

**-AIYARAA**

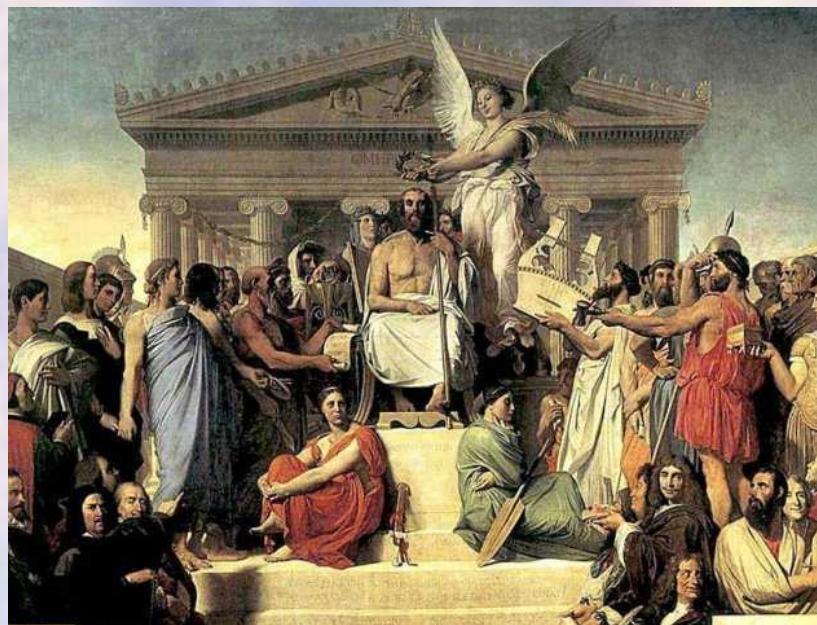
**I YEAR**

## MYTHOLOGY AND SCIENCE

*"Science has played a positive role in liberating us from the dogmas of the past. But at the same time, it has discredited the mythologies supporting almost every culture world-wide. The scientific tradition has many strong mythological features, but it is not (yet) complete enough to be considered a replacement."*

-Chris Steinbach

[Essay: "Mythology of Science"]



-google images

What comes to your mind when you think of the word myths? Of course, one would say that it's a set of stories pertain to the early history of a civilization usually also explaining the origin of the world. It consists of narratives that play a fundamental role in society. The study of myths is known as Mythology. But mythology is much more

than that, it is also a way of life for many. It has impacted different generations and will continue to do so.

Mythology has been an integral part of the life of human beings since antiquity. Its relationship with science is as old as that of the discipline itself. Myths are the stories that tell us who we are, and it involves the aspect of, what we know today as, Magic Realism (which combines naturalistic details and narrative with surreal or dreamlike elements). Imagination has been a strong creative force which is encapsulated in the mythical stories. These tales give an idea of the root of one's culture. For example, When the asura king Mahishasura defeats Indra, the king of the gods, and takes his place in heaven, the great goddess Durga is created from the divine energies of all the gods combined. She then takes on Mahishasura, the Buffalo Demon, and defeats him and his entire army, saving the world. This example shows that in our Indian culture, women too possess great courage, strength and righteousness and are not necessarily passive and meek.

It has been seen that as soon as people become aware of their own mortality, they create stories that give their lives meaning, explain their relationship to the higher world (i.e., the spiritual world), and instructs them how to live their lives. Mythological stories guide us towards the code of conduct. Bits and pieces of mythological references are sprawled throughout the modern world. These myths and legends, still remain known today. For example, in Greek mythology, Pandora being the first woman created by gods, was sent as a punishment. She opened the box which was forbidden to her by

Zeus. From that box, all manner of evil (disease, pain, misery, death etc.) was released into the world- ending the Golden Age of man and forsaking them to a life of death and diseases. This set a very negative precedent for the women that succeeded her, and this sexism still remains in the modern world.



-google images

In modern times, with the coming of scientific method, experiments and observations displaced faith in mythological stories. Science, unlike other ways of interpreting the world around us, tries to offer true progress, or so it tells us. Today it is believed that only through science will our understanding of the world improve, building on from what has come before.

In the nineteenth century, Mythology and science together were taken to be incompatible. Believers of science were assumed to be more scientific and rational being, which made them forsake the idea of myths. By and by, in the twentieth century, myths were re-characterized to accommodate Science. In other words, these two

different realms were intersecting rather than diverging.

*"I would say that all our sciences are the material that has to be mythologized. A mythology gives spiritual import- what one might call rather the psychological, inward import, of the world of nature round about us, as understood today. There's no real conflict between science and religion... What is in conflict is the science of 2000 BC... and the science of the 20th century."*

- Joseph Campbell

Therefore, one could say that old myths, Gods, heroes have never died. They are only resting at the bottom of our mind, waiting for our call. They represent the wisdom of our race and it is omnipresent. The strength of mythology also lay in ease with which people could identify with the characters in the tales, as these were always individuals with their own faults and shortcomings. Thus, mythological tales identify the repercussions of our actions in a way that emphasized the importance of wisdom. They serve as cautionary tales by using the fate of the mythological characters as examples to warn others and save them from making the same mistakes. The myths have survived to this day due to the fact that their narratives are still valid in contemporary contexts and correspond to situations that occur in our own day. The power of the myths lies in their symbolism, which not only helped shape the origins of modern story-telling, but also influenced the most tone-setting stories of our modern popular culture.

In ancient times, mythology was also used for humanizing natural occurrences that could not be explained or accounted for, such as thunderstorm, hurricanes.

Nevertheless, the main aspect of mythology is for people to have something to believe in and, for them to pray, for them to have hope, for them to have something to depend upon. Therefore, although science has proven that Gods did not exist, people still have religion, which is inextricably linked with mythology.

Thus, mythology still fulfills a purpose, as it always has, because it provides the insight that all human being needs. It can provide an excellent source of wisdom. Hence, the ancient mythological tales and their innate wisdom have an important role to play, more than ever before.

**-NUPUR JAMWAL**

**III YEAR**

## **RE-READING THE MYTHICAL STEPMOTHERS**

What image do you get when I introduce a lady as someone's stepmother? Do all your mental faculties become attentive towards the word 'stepmother'? Do you experience an involuntary wincing? I am pretty sure the word 'stepmother' brought to your mind an image of a tall lady with malicious eyes whose only purpose is to wreck havoc in her step child's life. The reason for this is the fact that from the very childhood we have been exposed to tales of various notorious stepmothers which have infused the idea of them being an evil creature firmly in our minds. Lady Tremaine is a classic evil stepmother who leaves no stone unturned to reduce Cinderella into a housemaid. Euripedes didn't help our cause when he wrote, "Better a serpent than a stepmother". The question is, are stepmothers synonymous with malevolence?

Indian mythology contains ample examples of the unkind and not-so-motherly step mothers. The first person to strike in our minds is Kaikeyi- the youngest wife of Lord Rama's father, King Dashrath. The ambitious queen, blinded by her greed to see her son ascend the throne and fueled by the venom laced words of her servant Manthra, blackmailed the king to send Rama into exile. The helpless king, bound by the promise he once made to his wife, had to show his eldest son the way to forest. Kaikeyi is thus shamed to be the typical step mother who cannot wish good for her step children. We have another famous evil stepmother in *Mahabharata*. She is held responsible for sowing

the seeds of the Great War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas as well as for disrupting her step son's life to satiate her own greed. She is none other than the fisherwoman queen, Satyavati. Her hunger for power and her desire to see her son become the king of Hastinapur caused the mighty Bhishma to take the oath of celibacy - which is often deemed as one of the reasons contributing to the war.

The examples of kind stepmothers are very few but, they are nonetheless, present. They often go unrecognised as a good stepmother in our blind focus on the greater ideal of motherhood. Kunti, one of the 5 pious virgins of Hindu religion, is one such woman. Known as the mother of the heroic pandavas, she bore only the three elder pandavas. The remaining two, Nakula and Sehdeva, were taken under her wings by their stepmother Kunti after the death of King Pandu and his second wife, Madri. Though not much is said about the relationship between Kunti and her step sons, it can be said that she wasn't biased towards her sons. An example would do good to prove this. Kunti once asks Arjuna to divide 'whatever' he had brought among all five brothers. Some sources even claim that she loved Sehdeva the most, though it is not adequately supported with proofs.

In my opinion, it is wrong to judge someone on the basis of his/her title. Indeed, the tag stepmother is always viewed in a negative light but it is a biased judgement. The Indian daily soaps still function on such stereotyping of a stepmother as evil. Shouldn't we question this tradition? Why is that only women are associated with the words 'evil' and 'wicked'? And who decides what is evil and what is not? Who has defined motherhood? We should not let it slip from our minds that each of these myths has a male

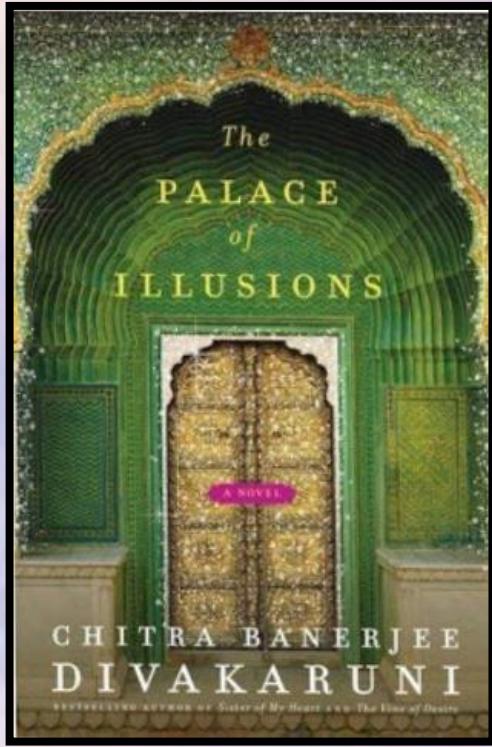
author. The society has, since time immemorial, been patriarchal. Therefore, it would not be entirely wrong if we make the guess that this myth of the 'evil step mother' is another of the many ways by which patriarchy ensures that women remain submissive, and not desire things for themselves. The nature of a person is supreme, an innately good person would not suddenly transform into a deviously plotting character once she becomes a stepmother. Mythology and folk tales have somehow taught us to hate the idea of having a stepmother without any proper reason. Compared to the previous times, the society today is relatively open to the idea of re-marriage after the death of one's spouse and this has resulted in an increase in the number of step families. The members adjust with each other even if there are some differences in the beginning.

To conclude, we can sum up that it is time we get rid of the stereotypes associated with various roles. Everything can be improved through the willingness to accept change and adjust in the new surroundings. Thus, even though the thought of welcoming a new woman in the family and addressing her as a mother might haunt the child at first but with the cooperative efforts of both, a beautiful harmonized relationship can flourish.

-SHREYA GUPTA

I YEAR

## **BOOK REVIEW: THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS**



- **TITLE:** The Palace of Illusions
- **AUTHOR:** Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
- **PUBLISHER:** Anchor; Reprint edition (February 10, 2009)
- **PRICE:** Rs. 499 (On Amazon)
- **GENRE:** Historical Fiction
- **BOOK-LENGTH/PAGES:** 384 pages

*"The heart itself is beyond control. That is its power and weakness."*

**Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni**, born in 1995, is an award-winning and bestselling author, poet, activist, and teacher. Her work has been published in over 50 magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*, while her books have been translated into at least 29 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew, Bengali, Russian, and Japanese. Several of her works have been made into films and plays as well. Divakaruni has also participated as a jury judging several prestigious awards, such as the **National Book Award** and the **PEN Faulkner Award** and is herself the winner of a number of awards, including the **American Book Award** and **Pushcart Prize**.

Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* acts as a connecting thread which blinds the ancient Indian culture to today's war-torn world. It is set in a mythic age. It is written in the first person narrative from Draupadi's perspective, giving a feminist re-reading of the text.

This novel uses the technique of *Magical Realism*, to enhance the narrative, as well as amplify the essence of the feminist interpretation of the *Mahabharata*. The book depicts the journey from the vantage point of Panchaali, a powerful woman driven by love, honor, and yet, bound by a fate that unfolds in spite of her resolve and in the end.

The tale begins with, her birth from fire- thus giving her the name *Yajnaseni*. She is married to the Pandavas, who are deprived of the rights of their father's kingdom. Panchaali joins their journey to reclaim their rights. Despite being a daughter of the king, she supported her husbands through the excruciating pain and humiliation of exile and a horrible war. .

The book also shows the complex and intimate relationship Draupadi shared with her friend- the mesmerizing and astonishing- Lord Krishna. The narrative also explores the protagonist's attraction to her husband's enemy- Karna.

***"Love comes like lightning, and disappears the same way. If you are lucky, it strikes you right. If not, you'll spend your life yearning for a man you can't have."***

This, far from the ideal, characterization of Draupadi makes her character more layered and complex, thus also making it possible for modern readers to relate to her trials and tribulations. Draupadi in the novel, as in the epic, is fierce and bold, and even steps over norms of polite conversation to question the patriarchal society. Her questions put even the great thinkers and knowledgeable adults of the time into a dilemma.

***"I am buoyant and expansive and uncontainable--but I always was so, only I never knew it!"***

She is a warrior in her own right as she fights against and questions the authorities, scrutinizing their laws & powers. But more than that, she acts as a resilient wife and nurturer for the five Pandavas.

One of the shortcomings of the otherwise remarkable text is the foreshadowing aspect, making it easy for the readers to predict the forthcoming events in an already known plotline. Moreover, the portrayal of the gender roles in the novel is flawed, the writer has reworked the epic, but the construction of gender roles still adheres to the patriarchal understanding of the sexes. Men, in this book, are depicted as the robust

warriors who fight wars and possess aggression, strength, and violence, while the women are shown as feeble and powerless beings, bearing the role of the defenseless victim, who have to depend on their male counterparts to avenge their own honor.

While the vocabulary used in the novel is fairly uncomplicated, Divakaruni uses certain Sanskrit terminology which might not be familiar for some readers. Otherwise, the book is simply mesmerizing. It is simply unputdownable.

-NITIKA CHOPRA

II YEAR

## **MYTHOLOGY AND FEMINISM**

Mythology has always been a polemical topic amongst people from all around the world. There have been debates on how the universe came into being: was it a result of the Big Bang or is there indeed a supreme power, a God that created it? The truth, however, comes down to the simple notion that it is all about perspective. A person's milieu shapes their thoughts. Having been brought up in religious households, and patriarchal ones at that, most of us have been told that the latter is true. As soon as we think of God, the image of a muscular man with wavy hair and a full grown beard gets conjured up in our minds. Those with the internalized notion that only a man can be the saviour figure would always tell us that God is a man. Epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are held in high regards even today because nobody of the modern times could achieve the benchmark that they had set. Besides being invincible in their approach, they also inadvertently put the women of their worlds in a patriarchal quagmire. With Sita having to enter a burning pyre to prove her fidelity to her husband, to Draupadi being harassed in front of an assembly of quasi-intellectuals, so many questions regarding what took place what should have happened instead remain unanswered.

Another delicate topic that mythologies touch on is war. War is often depicted as the ultimate agreement two parties can settle upon. All it takes for it to commence is for someone's vanity to deflate. It is often said that Helen of Troy was the cause of the siege of Troy but we know that Helen was merely an excuse for war and for men to exhibit and prove their masculinity in the battlefield.

*Mahabharata* in Hindu mythology is swarming with stories about injustices that are meted out to women. For instance, when Bhishma Pitama saw Amba, daughter of the king of Kashi, holding a swayamvara, he decided to abduct her and “gift” her to his brother, Vichitravirya, as a wife. Thus objectifying her and shutting his eyes to her own feelings. Such an act illustrates how a man could go to any length to fulfill his demand, so much so that something as fundamental as the consent of a woman became secondary. The idea of women as men’s ‘territory’ to be conquered and ‘property’ to be owned is predominant till date.

Fortunately, today we have a plethora of iconoclastic readings which help us clarify our doubts regarding mythology and question the norms of society. They prompt us to reconsider whatever was laid casually in the past. Some like Chandrabhati’s *Ramayana* present a flipside of the popular : Chandrabhati, a 16th century Bengali poetess, a vigilant woman and an early feminist of her time, re-tells Ramayana which isn’t about Rama. Far ahead of her time, she gives voice to Sita and puts forth the feminine perspective through her version of the epic. Her book doesn’t glorify war, thus asserting that after all war is not the epitome of masculinity.

It goes without saying that times have changed but myths and legends of the past still affect our everyday lives. Iconic names like Savitri, Harishchandra, Kansa et cetera have become adjectives which are attributed to people on a daily. Whether we take it for granted or be seriously invested in it, Mythology will undeniably continue to be very much a part of our existence.

SUKHJOT KAUR

(III YEAR)

## **GREEK MYTHOLOGY AND THE MODERN WORLD**

Greek mythology is concerned with stories related to gods, heroes, and rituals of the ancient Greeks. Owing to the popular piety of the Greeks, these myths were taken as true accounts. Therefore, we can say that Greek mythology has subsequent and extensive influence on the arts and literature of western civilisation, which fell heir to much of Greek culture. The elements of Greek mythology include gods of varying stature, humans, demi gods, titans, giants, monsters, nymphs and famed locations/sites.

People across various countries with different stages of civilisation have developed certain myths that explain the existence of natural phenomenon and seek to justify social and political institutions. Even poets and artists have derived inspiration from Greek mythology and discovered contemporary significance and relevance in these themes.

The myths of the ancient Greek gods and heroes have also been portrayed in various literary and artistic forms. Artists belonging to post-epic epochs have composed a multitude of pieces on Greek Gods and Greek myths. For instance, the Homeric poems *The Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are a repertoire of the events that define Greek mythology. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod tries to simplify Greek mythology. At the time of Hesiod, myths were recounted orally in each family. As a result, in each village, they were recounted differently. The book is dense and complex as it is full of myths and episodes that interrupt each other. The book is structured in sections such as preface, cosmogony, first generation of gods, second generation of gods, Zeus' fight for power, fourth generation of gods, Heroes' catalogue, and ode to the catalogue of heroines.

The ancient Greek mythology has influenced modern day work. Daily we come across words, city names, companies, literary allusions- zodiac, planets and constellations that borrow their name from Greek myths.

Even in the world of business the influence of mythology can be seen. One such example is Acis- a company that organizes educational travel for students. But the mythical roots of Acis differs greatly from its modern day namesake. According to the writer Ovid, Acis was a man whom the nymph Galatea deeply desired. This infuriated the cyclopes Polyphemus because he was madly in love with the beautiful nymph, so in order to take revenge the jealous beast crushed Acis under a huge rock. Galatea in mourning, changed his gushing blood from under the rock into river Acis, at the foot of Mount Actna.

There are several elements of Greek mythology that have appeared in Pop culture as well. Video games such as “Wrath of the Gods” was an adventure game that launched in 1996. It was set in mythical Greece and had an education component where players could learn about Greek history and view images of Greek art in cut-a-ways. The “God of War” franchise of video games is set under the same category with the main character being named after Kratos from Greek mythology. The video game shows Kratos as the son of Olympian god Zeus and is the personification of power. Moreover, mythological elements have been used in Renaissance art and English poems, as well as film and literature, songs and commercials. The influence of Greek mythology has permeated into government and public

institutions; Romans conquerors have used Greek mythology and it has also been applied in science and technology.

The use of Greek mythology has also been used in the psychoanalytic theory. The term Oedipus complex, coined by the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, denotes the emotions and ideas that the mind keeps in the unconscious part. Oedipus complex is a complex where a man is very close to his mother but has jealousy/hatred for his father. This comes from Oedipus because he was destined during his birth to kill his father and marry his own mother.

In another example, Nike - the God of victory – is frequently referred to in military projects such as the 1945 US mission known as the Nike Missile Project. There are also some natural elements whose names come from Greek mythology, such as Titanium. It is named after the Titans because of its difficulty to extract from its ore and because in Greek mythology the Titans were locked far underground.

Therefore we can conclude that Greek mythology is not restricted only to a particular era or the people of Greece but is ever prevalent and widespread in its approach.

RIA SEHGAL

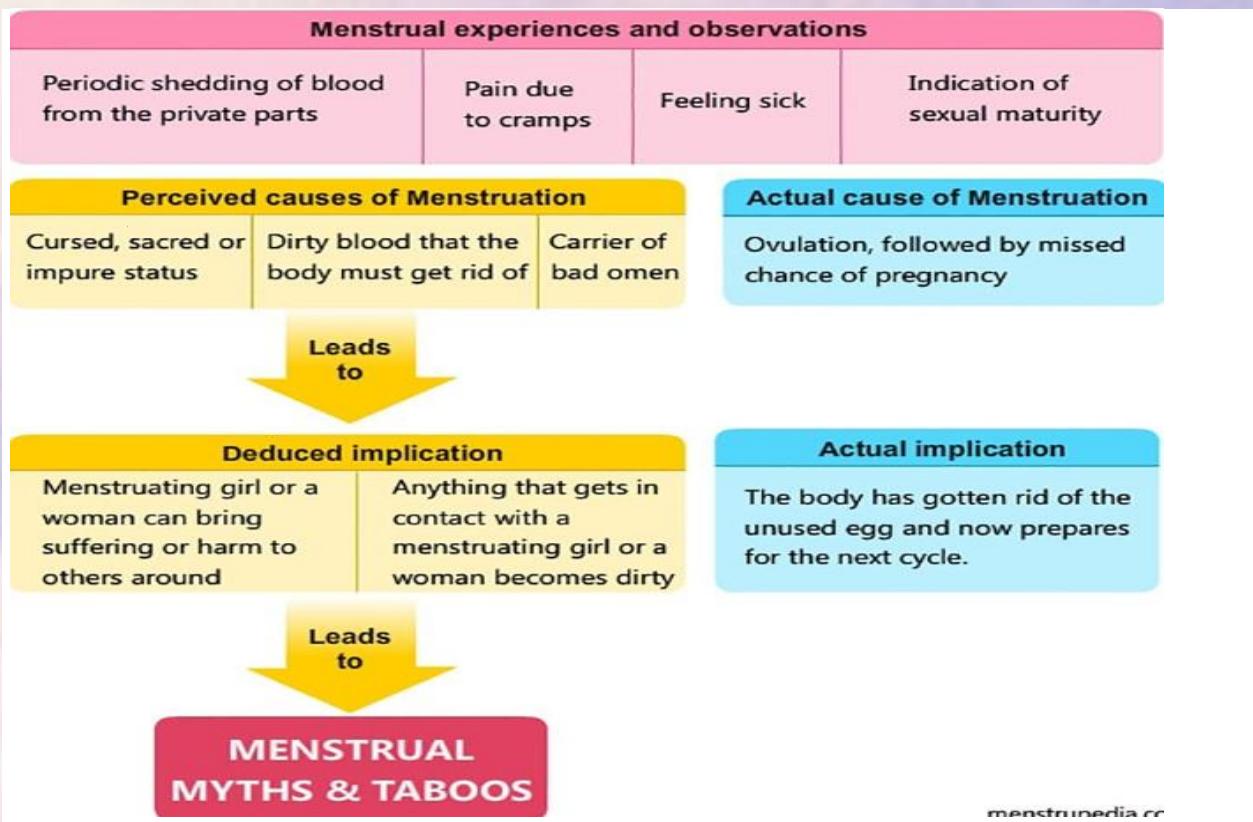
I YEAR

## **THE MYTHOLOGY OF MENSTRUAL TABOOS**

"Don't pray. You are under a curse right now! Don't enter the kitchen your presence shall spoil the food. Shhh!! Don't talk to a boy about it."

We at some point or the other might have come across menstrual taboos. While most of us would agree that menstrual blood is nothing but blood and tissues that could have been used to nourish the foetus in the womb had fertilization occurred, others might argue that the woman is either cursed or has a supernatural air to her.

The origin of menstrual taboos like many other social taboos can be traced to various cultural and religious practices which are specific to certain societies. Many ancient societies had a strong belief that menstruation cycle was a result of the violation of social rules. Along with it came the belief that the menstruating woman is cursed and is impure, and hence, her presence can bring suffering or harm to the ones around. This explains the idea of women being condemned to stay in separate rooms during menses, in several communities.



Menstruation, in some societies, was also believed to be a part of a greater cosmic cycle like that of the moon. Different societies understood the cycle differently and had their own set of taboos. For instance, the Kung hunter-gatherers of Kalahari believed that a woman would start menstruating simply upon hearing of another woman menstruating. Similarly, Yurok Indians of North California believed that all the fertile women of a household who are not pregnant menstruate at the same time. In fact, this is a popular belief in many urban societies too.

There have also been beliefs in some societies that the menstrual blood is a source of feminine strength and has the ability to destroy the enemies. In Ancient Rome, it was believed that a naked menstruating woman could scare away hailstorms, whirlwinds,

lightning, and could make caterpillars fall from the ears of corn. In Africa, menstrual blood was used in magic charms for both purity and destruction.

India has its own story behind the existing taboos. The origin of these myths dates back to the Vedic times and is often linked to Indra's slaying of Vritras. It has been declared in one of the Vedas that it is the guilt of killing a brahmana which appears every month as menstrual flow since women had taken upon themselves a part of Indra's guilt. This is the reason why Hindu women are denied participation in the various social and religious rituals when they are menstruating and therefore need to be 'purified' before resuming their daily chores. Such a seclusion was also penned down by Vyasa in the great epic of *Mahabharata*. When Draupadi (with open hair, dressed in a single garment) is being dragged down into the assembly of men by Dushasana, she protests that she is unfit for a public/official gathering because this is the time of her monthly course and she is supposed to be living in seclusion for the next few days.

Not only the Hindu religion but the Islamic religion also condemns women to the seclusion ritual. The Islamic interpretation forbids menstruating women from entering mosques. And a spiritual bath is deemed necessary before continuing praying and fasting. Jainism also considers the blood impure and thus does not allow women to cook or visit temples while menstruating.

There are other religions like Sikhism that treat women as complete equals of men. Sikhism does not have any of those superstitious practices of treating women as impure during menstruation. And where, Orthodox Christian communities do not allow women to receive communion during their periods, non-Orthodox communities

do not have any such beliefs. Buddhism also looks at menstruation as nothing more than a natural process that women have to undergo, though Japanese Buddhism has some aversion towards a menstruating body.

At present, the old taboos continue to stay because of the people who blindly follow them even after being aware of the true facts. We can say that these are the ways in which myths still have a control over people's minds. People follow the myths thinking that their ancestors cannot be wrong. But a new intellectual is still in the making who not only questions this blind faith but denies following the taboos that have no basis.

The society, though changing, still continues to look at a menstruating woman differently. The change is slow to come and initiatives are being taken from all sides but like any other journey, first you and I need to begin with the step of breaking the taboos for ourselves and encouraging others to do the same.

ANKITA

I YEAR

## HELEN. TROY. LOVE.

The city of Troy wasn't burned for love.

Love, honey, is as fragile as your smile.

Love is a flower that will grow-

because that's all it ever knows,

and Helen, my dear, wasn't the criminal.

She was the ugliest victim of the war of ugly love.

She was a victim of men too powerful,

too twisted in pride, in power.

For me, Helen was more than the most beautiful woman,

when I think of her, she comes to me as someone

who wasn't meant to be a Rose in a trimmed garden

she, I think, would have been more of a stubborn wildflower

growing in banned places.

She, I think, Paris and Agamemnon forgot couldn't be loved

in a castle among silk sheets on beds.

She, was to be loved in open meadows where there was sunlight and

where the sky pierced itself to make way for the stars to watch her.

She, I think, was filled with goodness and honey

She, I think, could have fed and grown a thousand Troys with her love,

beauty and honey and milk,

had she only been loved right.

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