

The soul journey: a Kashmiri tale

Thangbiakching^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Jung called the metamorphosis into selfhood “a transformation of nature into culture, of instinct into spirit” (Jung, 1954). A Kashmiri tale of the Wicked Stepmother symbolize the very essence of transformation as defined by Jung. Archetypal amplification is used to understand the symbols latent in the story as we uncover psychological truths latent in the story that may initiate and stimulate the growth of self through psychological separation and death.

Keywords: *Myth, Archetype, Shadow, Self, True Self*

A story once told remains within the psyche of the listener and becomes a part of his nature. Different stories tell different wants, desires, goals, or even a journey. One may find their faith in a story, while some may find their root, and yet others may find their healing (Sobol, Gentile, & Sun Wolf, 2004). We reflect and relate as we live our own stories in our everyday life. The story that have been chosen here is the Wicked Stepmother, taken from Rev. J. Hinton Knowles book “Folk-Tale of Kashmir” (1893). The story seemed fairly familiar as its skeletal structure runs in parallel with the story of Cinderella. Myths, fairytales, and stories can initiate self-realization, and so is true of the story of the Wicked Stepmother. Thus the archetypal story of Cinderella has been fascinating cultures for decades, be it in the form of a simple narrative or movies. The storyline of movies that run along the theme of rag to riches yet romance movies are insurmountable in number; and it does not matter how many times the story has been told, it can be retold over and over again. Some classic examples would be *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Notting Hill* (1999), *Legally Blonde* (2001), *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), and so on. These movies are true to the essence of the Cinderella story structure where the woman usually end up finding her soul-mate, and also a place and standing in the society, in that their societal standing is improved in relation to the man they find in their life.

Myths have the unnerving power to essentially reveal yet with-hold desires and motives. They express without the individual ever needing to express themselves. In myths, the unconscious becomes alive in the form of a wise old guide, a talking animal, a good mother, a wicked stepmother, even kings and queens, or a trickster. Myth, according to Eliade (1963), tells us what really happened as it tells us the about the fabled time of the beginnings. It is because of myths we know the deeds of the gods, and at the same time we also know the age

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Aryabhata College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

*Responding Author

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old stories of the heroes who once faced trials and tribulation. In their existence we find our Selves in the form of an archetype. If it is revenge that we seek, so was there a god that was once vengeful; if lust is what drive our needs, so was there a god that was once lustful; we may let our jealousy and temper rule over us, so was there a god that once killed and destroyed kingdoms due to their jealousy and losing temper over matters that may be deemed unimportant by some. The gods have done it all, and they become the narrative that lived once upon a time. Myths, thus, narrates the story of an individual, that is, our story, as plainly as it is, yet concealing its true nature. Thus, it reflects deeply in our psyche; and so, we can never really escape our unconscious want for a rag to riches story, although we believe them just to be a *myth*. With this in mind, let us narrate again a Kashmiri tale of the Wicked Stepmother and make an attempt to look into the story from a psychological perspective.

“A Brahman once told his wife not to eat anything in his absence him, for if she did she would turn into a goat. His wife told him if he did the same in her absence he would turn into a tiger. One day, it so happened, while giving food to her children she happens to taste the food. It was in that moment the wife turned into a goat.

The Brahman on seeing the goat inside the house lamented his wife. He took her to the yard where he tied her and took proper care of her. In due time the Brahman married again. But his new wife was not as kind to his children. She despised them and was unkind to them, and would give them little to eat. The goat saw how her children were being treated and heard them complaining too. One day she called her children and told them to strike her horn. When they did so, food fell down for them. And it was so that, instead of becoming thinner and weaker, as their step-mother thought they would, they became stronger and healthier.

The stepmother bore the Brahman a daughter who had only one eye. When the child was able enough to walk and talk, the mother told her to keep an eye on her step-siblings; she wanted to know where and how they got their food. The little girl latched onto her step siblings and stayed with them the whole day. That day she told her mother about the goat from whose horn food would fall.

The step-mother feigned illness and bribed the hakim to tell her husband that she would get well only if she gets to eat a goats' meat. The Brahman on hearing this felt aggrieved as he did not have money to purchase a goat yet he wanted his wife to recover. So the goat was to be killed.

The children went to their goat mother and told her everything as they wept. The goat told them to not be grieved, but to collect her bones and bury them all together in a secret place. They did as their goat-mother told them. The sibling never hunger for food anymore for they were always fed well with good food in that secret place where the bones were buried.

One day, as the daughter was washing her face in the river her nose ring fell off in the river. The ring was swallowed by a fish which was caught by a fisherman who sold it to the cook of the palace. The cook was dumbfounded when he found the ring inside the fish. He took it to the king, who was profoundly enamoured by the ring. He issued a proclamation that was to be sent to every town and village to inquire to the king if anyone had lost their nose ring. The brother happens to chance upon the proclamation and inquired the king regarding the same, telling him that it belonged to his sister. The king ordered the girl to be presented to him. When she did present herself to the king, he was mesmerized with her beauty and good

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manner. The king asked her to marry him. The girl agreed; and thus, there was never a day when the siblings were hungry again.”

HYPOTHETICAL INTERPRETATION

Food, in essence, is a matter of survival. To eat is the willingness to survive. We may indulge ourselves in eating, or we may refrain from eating. Eating, in the tale, may be symbolic of not only survival, but also of one's mental caliber. For it is when you are matured and developed that you do not mind eating alone, or you have to eat alone. So it is that when either of them eats alone for the first time, the other was to turn into an animal that could be domesticated, or turn into a wild beast. This animal that may be domesticated or the wild beast that may be feared, are in essence one and the same, for they merely represent the wild in one that could either be tamed or be allowed to become the beast that one truly is. This animal is the instinct (Hannah, 2006) which if realized consciously may become a source of life and creativity, but if let to drive us unconsciously, could become the source of regression into the animal instinct (Jung, 1970). In the act of eating alone, this animal is freed; in other word, the inner true being or the *daimon* is released when one is mature enough to feed oneself without the hassle of needing another person to be able to satisfy one's own hunger. But still, it is tamed and still felt responsible toward *her* children. Goat is symbolic of the wild, of something that flees away from the herd as opposed to the sheep who flees and pasture peacefully. The goat that is arrogant, beastly, and wild, is also the scapegoat. Goat, in this essence, are the food of the soul that may nourish us still when the pressure from the world inhibits us from our becoming. It is the destruction of ignorance, as it draws the chariot of Thor, the god of thunder, and provide him with flesh to be eaten each day. Goat is, thus, the eventful insight that may stride on his own way in search of higher ground and food. And so, the woman immediately turns into a goat when she tastes the food of her children. As Jung writes, “For in every adult there lurks a child- an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed, and calls for unceasing care, attention and education. That is the part of the personality which wants to develop and become whole” (Jung, 1954).

The separation between the tamed wife and the Brahman is being lamented by the man. Only to be soon replaced by another woman. But the goat is nurtured still. So the children are fed well and are healthy even though the wicked stepmother may try to suppress them. The wicked stepmother herein symbolizes the stoic strictness of the social prejudices and systems that may abhor the inner wild beast and growth of the child within. She is the one who bore the daughter with one eye, who reminds us of Ra, the one eyed god, or the all-seeing eye of god who is righteous and just. It is the eye of *Sauron*, who watches over the fateful. Because of this eye, the children are found, and the goat is killed. It is an admonition. A teaching of the super-ego as one learns the issues and role of being assimilated into a society and thus, have to assign oneself with an identity prescribed not by oneself, but by the environment that one is born into and its pressure of becoming that which adults intent them to become. But insights never die, the wild in us never die. What remains are the bone. And when the bone is loved it grows its flesh back. As in the skeletal woman, it is when you meet your destruction that you are liberated with an awakening.

So it was that one day the stepdaughter washed her face in the river and her nose ring fell off- a symbolic representation of marriage, and of fertility. This was picked up by a fish which happened to be caught by a fisherman, who sold it to the cook of the palace. The symbolism of fertility, nurturance and abundance is maintained throughout the lineage from when the nose ring fell to when it reaches the King. Thusly, she is ready. Not because she has become of age, but because she has learnt to overcome the stepmother simply by having her own

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secret place where she can eat in abundance whenever she wants. This is symbolic as it manifests the need of maintaining and keeping true that one thing in us that may be considered wild, or childish, or even meaningless. This is further exhibited by the meeting between her and the King which took place only through the introduction of the brother – a necessary protector of the true essence of the soul – because one does not wander alone when one is already a matured individual. Instead, it is in the nature of the soul to have the contra opposite who may guide the so-called soul to a place of abundance and nurturance where one may not hunger oneself anymore. Simply because one is whole as she/he is. There is no need of the physical opposite in the external one, for the opposite is there in one's own Self. One is complete, and at peace. The tale is thus, about the societal influence and insemination of the social prejudices onto the persona of an individual, yet developing and maintaining ones' own persona through the journey by permitting oneself with the necessary destruction of the self, resulting in the birth of the contra opposite in the Self.

CONCLUSION

The story of the wicked stepmother is the story of an individual who finds in herself the true worth of the instinct, as she feeds on her own wild inner self while at the same time learning the ways of the societal world. For it is important to develop both, as one cannot disregard the importance of others in ones' life. Such maintaining of the inner secret place where she constantly feeds herself develops in her an identity that is true to her to rule all and master all, as she becomes her own master in her own kingdom. So it is that she, and her brother, never hungers again. The story is, thus, the story of an individuals' development of a persona as she/he allows the necessary destruction and eventual death of the self, yet maintains and feeds her/his own insights, dreams, intuition by remaining true to her/his own true self, and not losing oneself in the process of becoming an individual in the society. This death is not the physical death, but the psychological death, the sacrificial death for the rebirth. A death of the dependent being who is unwilling to feed herself without the presence of others, maybe in the form of acknowledgement, submission, recognition, and acceptance: to birth the individual who is self-abundant, and sufficient. This remains the ideal self and the true self at the same time; allowing the person a well-adjusted personal identity, an ideal social adjustment, and emotionally attuned to the needs of not only oneself but others around them. Furthering and nurturing a healthy relationship within and without.

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Conflict of Interest

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