

## KASHMIR MYTHS

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### Abstract

*Myths and cultures are intricately and tacitly related. Sometimes, myths are very old as compared to the culture to which it has significance. Myths are the stories of cultural beginnings as we find in Kashmir history in abundance. For example Nilmata gives a lengthy account of the legends relating to the Satisaras. Myths till date influence and shape the people's lives and ways of thinking. They still help to shape the way many people understand themselves and the world. Some myths are explanatory, posing and offering the answers to questions that puzzle the philosophers. . It is believed that philosophers have resorted to the language of myths. Some myths study the cause and origin of a thing or phenomena in the world. Some myths legitimize particular people or a ruling family. The myths stretch our ways of perceiving the world and have the power to lift us away from our mental habits. In our world full of fear, loneliness and alienation, myths can console us with stories of a more heroic, more chivalrous time to sustain us. We all live in the present context also, only by virtue of our myths. In this paper an attempt has been made to understand the nature and function of the Myth in the*

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*light of some prominent theories.*

### Introduction

Myths, all over the world cultures, are special kind of stories, legends and fantasies. They are in no way realistic things in ordinary human world. Its characters are extraordinary and hence have no relationship with the common man's world. Myths are related, sometimes to magic, other times to gods or goddesses, where the earth is alive and animals can talk. It is bundles of stories and legends set in time that cannot be measured by the clock or before clock time began. Great suffering and pleasure may last for eons. They are fairy tales that begin with the phrase 'once upon a time'. Fairy tales may end in happiness but many of the world's myths end in tragedy.

Myths and cultures are intricately and tacitly related. Sometimes, myths are very old as compared to the culture to which it has significance. Janet Parker and Julie Stanton write, "Myths permeate every culture, and are borrowed, retold and live again in fresh imaginings". Myths are the stories of cultural beginnings as we find in Kashmir history in abundance. For example *Nilmata* gives a lengthy account of the legends relating to the Satisaras. The demon Jalodava had made it his habitation and was threat to Kashmiri people. The desiccation of the lake by the gods as the result of the prayer of Kasyapa brought also destruction of the demons. We find enough of stories accounting for the creation of Kashmir. In representing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as the leaders of gods, assisted Kasyapa in the defeat of demon. The name of Kashmir is explained in the *Nilmata* in the light of these stories.

Myths till date influence and shape the peoples lives and ways of thinking. They still help to shape the way many people understand themselves and the world. According to Lawrence, every Kashmiri believes that, "the saints will aid if men will call" and

they think that a dead saint is more efficacious than a living priest. According to him the Kashmiri are called by foreigners as "*Pir Parast*" that is saint-worshippers and the epithet is well-deserved. Even today, a car, matador, bus, truck or any other vehicle driver, switches off the tape of his vehicle when he has to pass through a shrine.

### The purpose of Myths

Some myths are explanatory, posing and offering the answers to questions that puzzle the philosophers. According to Janet Parker and Julie Stanton there are many such questions like, what is the beginning of life? What happens after death? Are there gods and goddesses, and if so, what are they like and how should humans behave toward them? How will the world end? What is the best way to die? There may not be rational answer to these questions. It is believed that philosophers have resorted to the language of myths. Some myths study the cause and origin of a thing or phenomena in the world. For example, why is Himalaya designed as it is, one would like to question every phenomena of nature. Many etiological myths offer answers that science casts aside because science has its own scientific method to employ to seek answers. Some myths legitimize particular people or a ruling family. Rulers in various cultures usually try to find their descend from a god or from priestly clan and the like. Myths provide a rationale for rituals by enforcing certain social behaviours. In tribal cultures, myths are potent means of socializing children into the ways of the people. In Kashmir social system both children and women until recently in particular and presently in general are socialized. A child in the name of their ancestors and in competition with others and the women in terms of behavior, are socialized. A woman, who behaves badly in our society, is a marked character in our place and public opinion is always against her. There is no area of our life that is not affected by a myth.

The writers of most myths remain unknown. Some tales go

beyond the introduction of printing press and most of them belong to the Greek civilization or ancient world. However, these do not include only myths, legends and fantasies but are told through sacred art works or carvings on rocks or special dances or music and ritual enactments. "For some myths, the words only gesture toward the totality of an evocation of a myth in such forms as chanting, drumming, body decoration and dance", says Janet Parker and Julie Stanton. In Kashmir the 'Dhambael' a kind of collective dance and collective bodily participation of villagers, is an example of such an experience. This dance uses the sense of myth in terms of Mythic time and space. Lawrence provides us such an experience in an episode to which he was witness. He writes,

*"I once saw a marriage party crossing a stream, above which stood the shrine of a saint. All of them dismounted and passed over the bridge but the father of the bridegroom, with the bridegroom in his arms, rode boldly over. The bridge broke and the horse, father and the son were precipitated into the stream, where they lay struggling".*

The Bharatis and bystanders according to Lawrence did not come to the rescue of drowning father with his bridegroom son. When he asked the gathering why they did not come to help, he was told, "they richly deserved the fate" for not respecting the shrine above. This episode or myth pointed to a real and specific location in a mythic time. Such myths in space and time are abundantly found in the valley of Kashmir. Harmukhta is the diadem of Lord Shiva. All shrines in Kashmir are associated with legends of self-denial and good-works; they are pleasant places of meeting at fair-time and the natural beauty of their surroundings is innumerable. In short, every rock, mountain, spring, cave, stream, rivers, ravines and grooves possess their own legends, stories and fantasies and are alive till date in one or the other form. Such stories have always evoked interest amongst the cultures, a deep

satisfaction to listeners who are familiar with the landscape so infused with mythic is evident everywhere around and what happened in mythic time and space resonates with the here and now.

### **Understanding Myths.**

From time to time, there have been attempts to explain myths in rational terms but failed. The historical explanation also does not interpret just why the particular myths developed in the way that they did. All the characters in myths could not live into figures of myth. Certainly some myths glorify a kingdom, a king, a city and give them divine sanction. Our Lalla Ded and Noor-ud-din Wali (RA), Budshah and Dargah Charisharief are not only glorified but spirituality is attached to them. In Kashmir, a man of miracles is also divinity personified. "There is something powerful about myths that transcend both reason and the boundaries of culture", says Janet Parker.

All people in the world have a thirst for insight into the mysteries of life. This thirst has initiated from the origin of consciousness to the end of the world. Myths in this regard have a terrible and enduring power because they do not limit the world. They associate their familiar world with wonder and marvel. They interact and intersect them with world of animal and that of the gods. "To explore the world of myth is to find a range of beliefs about the world from the stoic to the pessimistic from the tragic to the comic – but never the neutral". In our ancient, medieval and modern history we had and have myths set out to celebrate heroes or kings or persons. For example Kalhan writes about the rumors regarding the Bhiksacara, by which he was installed on the throne of Kashmir. The king Bhiksacara's who was renowned by these rumours, caused alarm to the kings of the time. It was rumoured about him that he was refined and ten rocks he could split with his arrow. He walked hundred Yojanas and back without getting tired. In our modern times a political hero was rumoured to have his name engraved on the leaves of the trees.

These myths stretch our ways of perceiving the world and have the power to lift us away from our mental habits. In our world full of fear, loneliness and alienation, myths can console us with stories of a more heroic, more chivalrous time to sustain us. We all live in the present context also, only by virtue of our myths.

### Theory of Myth: Dr. Jung.

According to Carl Jung there are psychological truths of myth, which he claims to be universal and necessary for the health of the human psyche. His belief is that man needs the stories, legends and fantasies based on myth only to make sense of the confusion of our society and our own psyches. According to him,

*“Myths voice the truths of our unconscious selves, and the gods, goddesses and heroes of myths embody aspects of creativity, cleverness, grief, joy, aggression and ecstasy. The monsters of myths are really monsters of the mind”.*

It may be confessed here that human beings are myth-makers in nature, always curious and always psychologically living. In psychological sense, according to Carl Jung, we are always in one mythic pattern or another and our freedom of choice as conscious human beings is the freedom to dance rather than stumble on way through the greatest story in the world – life. In me and amongst my folk, the myth has played a vital role. However, in the evolution of Kashmir culture, there occurred certain changes in the process of mythological beliefs, yet the society is even now myth ridden. According to Lawrence it was dangerous to discuss so great a mystery as the Hindu religion, yet he could not help noticing the important part which water-springs and snakes play in the Kashmir mythology. He adds that it was interesting for him to find Kashmiri with whom he had daily intercourse for six years, and of whose abilities he held in high opinion, believed that mythological tales of their own and old world tales were soul of their culture. According to him the whole valley was rich in myths

and there was not a mountain, river, or spring which had not some quaint legend attached to it—

*The fair humanities of old religions,  
The power, the beauty, the majesty,  
That had their haunts in dale or piny mountain  
Or forest, by slow stream or pebbly spring  
or chasms and watery depths.*

Lastly, it may be said that myth is the dream of a society and dream is only a personal experience. According to Joseph Campbell, a mythology philosopher of USA, myth is the support of the conscious lives of a society, whereas dream is the support of an individual consciousness. So, if private dreams are in accord with the public mythology, man is likely to live healthy in that society. If private dreams of individuals are out of step with the public, they are sure to be in trouble according to Joseph.

Aristotle has also rightly said that man who is the lover of myth is in a sense philosopher, for myth according to him is composed of wonders.

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