



THE DYING GOD ARCHETYPE: SYMBOLISING THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF EXISTENCE

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ABSTRACT



The Archetype is the symbol, image and part of conscious experience which remains hidden in the unconscious realms of an individual. These archetypes form sequence of patterns which would gather and lay in the state of hibernation in the collective unconscious of the individuals across the cultures. The hidden archetypal patterns from the collective unconscious find expression in the human behavior and perception when they are met with enough space which is provided by the appropriate stimulus. These dormant archetypal patterns find their vibrant expressions in human rituals, religious practices, and through the faculties of art and literature. By studying the expressions of human faculty of imagination and religious traditional practices, one can derive congruence among the cultures across the globe where it seems identical pattern emerging through these expressions which are the outcomes of hidden archetypal entities in human unconsciousness. The research paper would focus on the dying god archetypes which form identical patterns across the cultures of the globe which were having hardly any strong cultural contacts during the pre historic era. Moreover, they strengthen the concept of cyclical nature of existence.

Keywords: *Archetype, Culture, Ritual, Cyclical Existence, Collective Unconscious, Persona, Shadow, Anima-Animus, Self.*

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INTRODUCTION

Since the time immemorial, there exists the concept of life and death as immutable truths of life which cannot be altered because human fate is bound by these ubiquitous realities. But the concept of existence does not end here, but it goes beyond the notions of birth and death and poses such questions enquiring what happens aftermath of the death and what was happening before the birth. To answer it, many formulated theories, conceptualized variety of practices which later became indomitable parts of religious practices and condescending rituals. But the humble questions still are nagging in our thought patterns as they have become the cause of our concern towards life; they are preventing many of us from enjoying the present moment of life to its fullest extent. They have become the reasons for developing mysticism and occultisms too. It led to the creation of something which supernatural or beyond human reach that could take care of the existence itself and as humans we have to live out our times and seek what is worthy to be sought. Even though, giving an exact definition to culture is scarcely possible, but understanding the components which together make the culture rich with its essence is very much possible by fathoming the depth of its customs and rituals which are the part of its belief systems. The sense of immortality pervades human psyche across the cultures. Immortality does not mean only impermanence but the life beyond the death. What makes life after death or life before the birth as a possibility? The answer can be derived from the cyclical nature of the existence as birth-death cycle which goes on eternally.

THE DYING GOD

Generally, gods would be treated as heroes or ascribed with super natural qualities as they perform maneuvers which are not possible for the normal human beings. These super human beings, often anthropomorphic and are bestowed with various weapon archetypes to be wielded during the times of need. "The prominent civilized nations, such as the Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, and Hindoos, the inhabitants of Iran and of Persia, the Greeks and the Romans as well as the Teutons and others, all began at an early stage to glorify their

heroes, mythical princes and kings, founders of religions, dynasties, empires or cities, in brief their national heroes, in a number of poetic tales and legends. The history of the birth and of the early life of these personalities came to be especially invested with fantastic features, which in different nations even though widely separated by space and entirely independent of each other present a baffling similarity, or in part a literal correspondence. Many investigators have long been impressed with this fact, and one of the chief problems of mythical research still consists in the elucidation of the reason for the extensive analogies in the fundamental out- lines of mythical tales, which are rendered still more enigmatical by the unanimity in certain details, and their reappearance in most of the mythical groupings" (The Myth. 8)

The concept and practice of dying god is present across the cultures. In some instances, it follows the cycle of birth, growth, death, ascension, resurrection, re-visitation. And in other instances, the re-visitation would not be possible if the god is punished by death for his un-acceptable deeds. In ancient Greece, one can easily come across the god Adonis who is considered as Semitic god. Adonis is born out of love between Theias and Myrrha. Adonis grows into a handsome man who is fond of hunting, his uhunting skills have accrued popularity across the nations. Both Aphrodite and Proserpine fell in love with him but he chose to be with Aphrodite, Adonis and Aphrodite made a good couple and were in conjugal bliss. His hunting skills brought up jealousy in many, among them Artemis was one, he kills Adonis so that he could not become a legendary in hunting skills. At his dead body Aphrodite grieves much and her tears fall down, at the place where her tears have fallen, the peculiar kind of flowers Anemones grow. Every year during the season of spring the flowers bloom and carpet the earth as it is the resurrection of Adonis. It is the death and birth cycle, may not be physical but symbolic one. A cyclical one.

Odin is Norse god who is the representative figure of war and abundance. He is the son of Bor and Bestla who were the Asgardians. He gives away one eye for the sake of earning wisdom and



knowledge signifying the importance of the both in one's life. Odin is adored by the many wandering populace across the Europe especially Nordic and Germanic tribes. He is also called Woden, Wooden, and a day of the week Wednesday is named after him. Odin being a mighty god, lives up to his ripe age with catchet and panache. He was against Loki's policies and consequently got exiled by him. Odin dies not but for one time, but for multiple times, every time he dies, he used to return from the land of the dead on an important mission as the occasion is predetermined one. He simply dies by dissolving his body into elemental energy and comes back by materialising it once again to live among the mortals to attend to the need of the hour. It works as a cyclical concept of existence in Norse mythology.

Baldr is Odin's son and his mother is Frigg. Baldr is known as an eminent sailor and warrior among his men. He was in the possession of the greatest ever built battle ship Hrighhorni. Baldr is considered as a warrior god in Norse mythology. Prose Edda, an Old Norse work of literature says that Baldr was universally acclaimed and adorned as having the proclivity towards war and adventure. His mother Frigg extracts promise from all living things not to harm or kill Baldr but leaves mistletoe, a kind of plant which was finally used to kill him. Hel, the keeper of the dead in the underworld, promises that if all the creatures of the world weep for Baldr, she would return him to the world of mortals again to live among men and women. All creatures weep except one and still Baldr remained dead waiting for that gigantic creature also to weep so that he can come back to life again indicating the possibility of coming to life after death.

Corn mother goddess, who is the central figure in the native American tribal lore, is the person who brought Corn and its methods of cultivation to the people of America. She used to produce the corn through her body to feed the hungry and later accenting the request of the people she teaches them how to cultivate the corn by using the seeds of corn which would come out of her body after killing her. The killing is done on her own consent as a sacrifice for the benefit of humanity. Every year at the time of harvest a female effigy in the name of the

corn mother would be erected and would be burnt symbolizing the re-visitations to the land by the corn mother so that their lands would remain fertile enough to cultivate the corn. Fire sacrifice is believed to be the mode of possible resurrection. The immolation of the maternal figure symbolizes the sacrifice the mother takes to feed her children who otherwise may die of hunger. From her, it is believed, the native American tribes got the boons of buffalo, peyote and certain medicinal herbs which could heal any illness miraculously.

Tammuz is an assirian god of fertility, abundance, health and growth. He was popular god in the region predating the comman era when sheep rearing was the primary occupation of the people where for shephards the blanket growth of the greenery on pastures, health of the lambs and sufficiency of milk available in sheep for lambs is the primary concern. Tammuz was the god of the pastors, he use to take care of all their requirements. He is seen as the energy essence which is present in the grain and that essnes dies when seed is sown and takes birth again when the plant grows and yields multitudes of seeds. Istar, the goddess of heaven reveals that when Tammuz was killed by a wild boar, his blood is spilled over a green palnt and the plant gorws into big tree over night indicating that life once again revived out of the dead Tammuz. In another story related to Tammuz life and death was present during early dynastic III period in which two events were celebrated as the seasons of festivities, in which one indicating the marriage ceremony in which Tammuz was married to goddess Inanna and the second event related to Tammuz death in the hands of the dark forces of the netherworld. When Tammuz, after his death, enters the underworld, his mother Ishtar comes to his rescue and revives him to the world of mortals to live among human beings so that they can have their sheep and crops healthy. The death and revival of life goes on preventing all hinderance to the cyclical nature of existence.

Attis is a Phrygian god of Vegetation who was worshiped in ancient Phrygia. Cybele who was considered as the great mother of all the gods was his wife. Attis was known for his infidelity and as a punishment he was made insane and suffered from



bouts of insanity and self-torture. He castrates himself out of pain and unsatiated agony. He succumbs to his self-inflicted wounds and dies, his wife who is also known as Agditis follows him to the land of the dead and grieves his death pleads her case before Zeus, the father god for Attis resurrection. Zeus moved by her grief and lamentation and gives the boon of resurrection and consequent death to Attis. His body would never decay, it would remain as if it is alive well preserved. It would come to life in the spring, and dies when winter brings its day. As the seasons come and go without remaining here permanently so Attis would come to life and dies according to the cycles of the seasons. It indicates neither life nor death are the permeant phenomena, but the cycle of existence which encompasses those existential phenomena is permanent and ever happening.

Dionysus is the god of Athens, ancient Greece. He is the god of vegetation, corps and harvest one side, and the god of grapes, wine, drinking, and unrestrained orgy on other side. In Rome, Dionysus is known as Bacchus the god of wine. His father is Zeus and mother Semene. According to one account Zeus wife Hera doesn't know that her husband fathered a child with Semene and she becomes jealous of her. She plots with Titans so that the child would be killed. The young Dionysus comes to know about the plot turns into a goat and that same goat is killed by the Titans and eaten by them sparing the heart alone. Semene brings the heart to Zeus and grieves the death of her son. Zeus taking pity on her, makes the hurt turn into Dionysus again. It is life, death, life cycle coming to materialize. In another story it is said that Dionysus is made insane by Hera and commanded to wander across the globe visiting many kingdoms and preaching the wine making and ritual practices with his entourage of women followers who were called maenads. After a long time of being in wilderness, the goddess Cybele who is the principal deity in Greek mythology takes care of him and cures him of his madness and teaches him the secrets of life that involve birth and death cycles which are mingled in destruction and rejuvenation. These teachings remove the ignorance that was present in Dionysus

and make him capable to die and resurrect periodically without permanently residing in single state of being. As the god of harvest and fertility Dionysus dies every year and takes birth according to the cycles of the seasons as the crops die in wither and get resurrected in the spring periodically. Homer's Iliad, Greek playwright Euripides, Roman Poet Ovid, John Milton, John Keats, American poet and Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson mentioned Dionysus and utilized his themes in their poetry to render the importance of celebration of life and festivity of existence to their writings. Persona, according to the Carl Gustav Jung is something we humans wear as a mask to hide the reality of our behavior or thoughts. The mask would protect us from exposing and gives a false belief that we are fit in the society as acceptable to its set standards and norms. But to the essence of reality we are not. The shadow is what is hidden behind the persona, that which bothers us by hiding itself from individual's discovery it is like the 'Freudian unconscious'. The material whatever is present in the unconscious is not able to be traced by the conscious but they would find their expression through dream mechanism and through slips. Dionysus celebrations might bring out what is hidden in the unconscious and made it to be spent in the mode of carnival as once an individual is relieved of the nagging of the shadow or the suppressive material which is present in the unconscious, he/she would live a life of joy and freedom devoid of want or care. The self is something which is beyond the reach of persona or shadow, it does mean there neither negative nor positive, it is the mergence of pure being, a divine being. It seems that the cycle of birth and death and in between them the carnival would be formulated for getting rid of the burden of the stuff which is present in the unconscious.

When the 'Ramayana' comes to an end, Sri Ram has to die in order to end his avatar because whatever takes birth on the planet, it has to die whether it is human or non-human being. Sri Ram has also to die. But the main hinderance on the way of ending his avatar comes from Hanuman who is an ardent and the most dedicated loyal servant because as the servant he used to keep vigil around the clock



and it is impossible for the god of death "Yama" to enter into the palace to take Rama's life. To distract Hanuman from the occasion of his death, Lord Ram throws off his ring into a crack at the door side in the palace, and asks Hanuman to fetch back his ring as if it has fallen accidentally. Hanuman by dwarfing his size enters into the furrow that leads him to Nagaloka. There he meets 'Vasuki' who is the lord of the Nagaloka. Upon being asked about the Rama's ring, Vasuki shows Hanuman a mountain of rings which are purely identical to one another. Hanuman gets mesmerized and finds it is impossible to find Rama's ring among them as they are absolutely identical to one another. Hanuman gets confused at the sight of the rings. They all are arranged in designated shelves. Vasuki explains that after a regular lapse of time a monkey comes to visit the Nagaloka searching for Rama's ring and finds the presence of multitudes of rings and understands the truth behind life and death cycle and returns to the land of mortals enlightened. Hanuman understands the truth behind the pile of the rings and lets Ram leave his body. On mountain of rings some shelves are remain empty indicating that in future the same incidents would occur as part of cyclical nature of existence. It does mean once again Ram takes birth, Hanuman takes birth, again entire Ramayana would again happen and at the end Hanuman re-enter Nagaloka and would meet Vasuki for finding the ring and realizes the truth again. It is an eternal cycle of existential reality.

In Christian mythology one can observe the cycles of birth, enlightenment, crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming indicating something as predestined nature of order which fit into the realm of cyclical nature of existence. As on appointed days Jesus was born, and He has given away the life on an appointed day, and according to his chosen way. And on an appointed day he has been resurrected to life.

According to Jung, there remains the remnants of mythemes in a structural pattern which are called archetypal patterns in collective human unconscious which are resplendent with the facts of nature and existence that pervade the concept of life

death rebirth cycle and at the end "Nothing exists out of cycle".

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