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Janus Myth

With Reference to Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*

Ghayathry D., M.A., M.Phil.

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Introduction – What is a Myth?

Myth is a legendary or invented story, celebrating the life/lives of heroes and demigods and deities, rooted in primitive folk belief, presenting supernatural episodes to explain natural events and facts. Myths attempt to interpret creation, divinity and religion; to explain the meaning of existence and death. Myths may or may not be connected with the regular alternation of day and night and of winter and summer.

Romans worshipped their Gods on both individual and communal levels. Each part of a Roman house had a God associated with it. The God Janus presided over the main door to the house; Janus was envisioned as a human figure that faced both directions at once and was

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thus suited to watch over the doorway. The Romans believed that if they paid due respect to these gods each day, they could be confident of enjoying divine blessing for their daily activities.

Myth is an ancient traditional story of gods or heroes, especially one explaining some fact or phenomenon of nature. It might be a commonly held belief without any rational foundation. It also refers to a story with a veiled meaning that has taken roots in a culture. Although it is difficult to draw rigid distinctions among various types of traditional tales, people who study mythology find it useful to categorize them.

Myth has always had a very significant position in human psychology and society from its beginnings as primitive religious narrative to its recent adaptation as an aid in the exploration of the unconscious mind. Myths are deep rooted in the psyche of the whole society and they are created to serve some function or to explain the mysterious natural phenomenon. The divine myths explaining the natural divine powers are the reflections of human thoughts and superstitions.

Most myths are related to social rituals – set forms and procedures in sacred ceremonies. But anthropologists disagree as to whether rituals generated myths or myths generated rituals. Myths attempt to interpret creation, divinity and religion; to explain the meaning of existence and death; to account for natural phenomena; and to chronicle the adventures of legendary heroes.

Myths are not simply a collection of stories passed down from ancient peoples; they are a fundamental part of every culture, both past and present. Their influence can still be felt in our languages, religions and customs. In many parts of the world, the beliefs and rituals

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that are inextricably linked with these mythologies remain an essential element of everyday life and culture.

The universal human practice of myth-making appears to be the earliest means by which people interpreted the natural world and the society in which they lived. Thus myth has been the dominant mode of human reflection for the greater part of human history.

Myths about the Roman God Janus

Janus is the Roman god of gates and doors, beginnings and endings. The first of January was dedicated by the Romans to their God of gates and doors. A very old Italian god, Janus has a distinctive artistic appearance in that he is commonly depicted with two faces... one regarding what is behind and the other looking toward what lies ahead. Thus Janus is representative of contemplation on the happenings of the past year, while looking forward to the new. Some sources claim that Janus was characterized in such a peculiar fashion due to the notion that doors and gates look in two directions. Therefore, the God could look both backward and forward at the same time; Janus was portrayed with one bearded face and the other clean-shaven, which may have symbolized the moon and the sun, or age and youth. Later, he is most often shown with beards on both faces and frequently holds a key in his right hand. Very early statues of Janus (around the second century B.C.) depict him with four faces.

In his role as the Guardian of Exits and Entrances, Janus was also believed to represent beginnings. The explanation for this belief being that one must emerge through a door or gate in order to enter into a new place. Therefore, the Romans also considered Janus as the god of Beginnings and his name was an obvious choice for the first month of their year. A month referred to by the Ancient Romans as Ianuarius, which is not so far removed

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from the modern day “January”, taken from the Etruscan word Jauna which means “door”. Originally, however, Janus was honored on the first day of every month, in addition to being worshipped at the beginning of the planting season and again at the harvest. Deference was also paid to him at the most important beginnings in the life of an individual such as birth and marriage.

In Rome, temples dedicated to Janus were numerous, the most important being known as the Janus Geminus, a double-gated structure (one door facing the rising sun and the other, the setting sun) found on the forum Romanum through which the Roman legionaries marched off to battle. This particular temple served a symbolic function. When the gates of the temple were closed, this represented peace within the Roman Empire; when the gates were open, it meant that Rome was at war.

He particularly presided over all that is double-edged in life, and represented the transition between the primitive and the civilized. He opened and closed all things, and sat, not only on the confines of the Earth, but also at the gates of Heaven. Air, sea and land were in the hollow of his hands, and the world moved on its hinges at his command. He was popularly represented seated with two heads, one that of a youth (to signify the concept of beginning), the other that of an aged man (indicating the end). In his left hand he held a key, to show that he opened all things in the beginning, and shut them at the end, and in his right hand he carried the scepter with which he controlled all undertakings and their progress.

Janus Myth is compared here with Amulya Malladi’s masterfully written new novel *The Mango Season*, in which a young woman must decide whether to follow her heart or tradition.

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Amulya Malladi

Amulya Malladi was born in 1974 in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. She pursued a Bachelor's Degree in Electronics Engineering from Osmania University, Hyderabad and secured a Masters Degree in Journalism from the University of Memphis, Tennessee, United States. She then moved on to working as an online editor for a high-tech publishing house in San Francisco, and then as a marketing manager for a software company in the Silicon Valley. After living in the United States for many years, Malladi shifted base to Copenhagen, Denmark with her husband Soren Rasmussen and her two sons. Malladi's father was working in the Indian Army, and hence Amulya had lived all over the country.

Love Relationships in Amulya's Novels

Amulya Malladi's novels explore love/relationships that happen between the most unlikely people in the most unlikely situations. A sharp antithesis to the love stories that authors are penning between college friends or urban, modern couples constantly on-the-go, Amulya's work of fiction explores complex themes and settings. She has written five novels

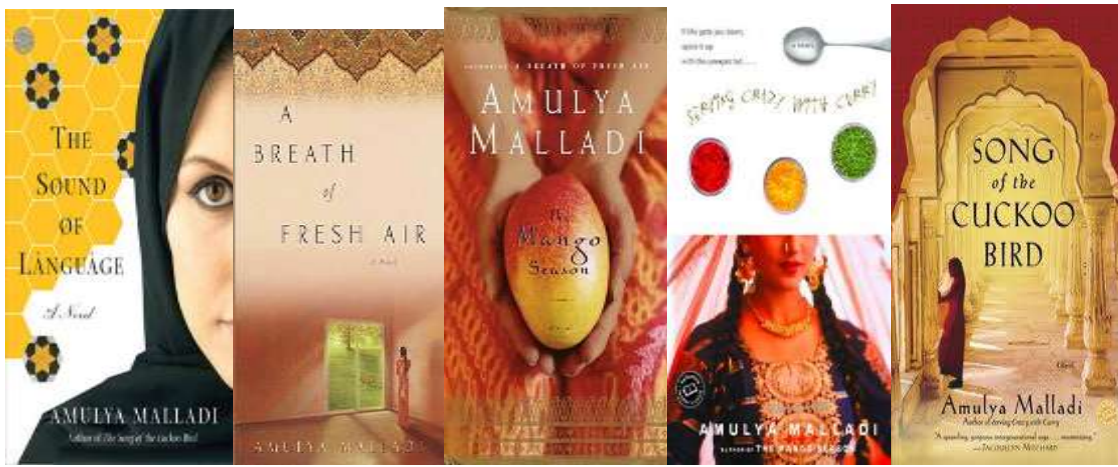
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till now: *A Breath of Fresh Air, The Mango Season, Serving Crazy with Curry, The Sound of Language* and *Song of the Cuckoo Bird*.



The Sound of Language

The Sound of Language is the story of an Afghan refugee Raihana, who comes to Denmark, just a few months before 9/11. In Denmark, refugees get monetary support from the government and in return, they are obligated to take Danish classes and participate in what is called praktik. Usually refugees cluster together and speak in their native language as they clean supermarkets or do other jobs of the same nature for their praktik. But Raihana finds a praktik with a beekeeper, Gunnar. Recently widowed, Gunnar is an unhappy man. He and his wife had loved their bees and now Gunnar ignores them, uncaring that they'll die if he doesn't pay them attention. He's resistant to have Raihana work for him at first, but slowly she worms her way into his life, and helps resurrect his love for bees and his life. Gunnar in return makes Raihana leave her past behind and embrace her future.

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This is not a love story. This is a story about a unique friendship between two people who cannot communicate clearly with each other because they don't speak the same language.

Song of the Cuckoo Bird

Kokila came to Tella Meda, an ashram by the Bay of Bengal, an orphan, barely a month after she was married. She was just 11 years old. Once there Kokila made a choice that altered the fabric of her life. Instead of becoming a respectable woman, a wife and mother, youthful passion and fear drove Kokila to choose to remain at Tella Meda under the care of the young and handsome guru, Charvi.

A Breath of Fresh Air

On December 3, 1984, Anjali waits for her husband to pick her up at the station in Bhopal. In an instant, her world changes forever. Her anger at his being late turns to horror when a catastrophic gas leak poisons the city air. Anjali miraculously survives. Her marriage does not. A smart, successful schoolteacher, Anjali is now remarried to Sandeep, a loving man, a professor. Their lives would be nearly perfect, if not for their young son's declining health. But when Anjali's first husband suddenly reappears in her life, she is thrown back to those troubling days of their marriage with a force that impacts everyone around her.

The Mango Season

The Mango Season is a dramatic portrait of modern woman's anguish over her inability to blend her two worlds. The story is told with beautiful word pictures. Malladi's imagery makes one hope for a juicy, tasty, happy end the story, a rich ripe mango.

Serving Crazy with Curry

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Between the pressures to marry and become a traditional Indian wife and the humiliation of losing her job in Silicon Valley, Devi is on the edge-where the only way out seems to be to jump.

Yet Devi's plans to "end it all" fall short when she is saved by the last person she wants to see: her mother. Forced to move in with her parents until she recovers, Devi refuses to speak. Instead, she cooks . . . nonstop. And not the usual fare, but off the wall twists on Indian classics, likes blueberry curry chicken or Cajun prawn biryani. Now family meals are no longer obligations. Devi's parents, her sister, and her brother-in-law can't get enough, and they suddenly find their lives taking turns as surprising as the impromptu creations Devi whips up in the kitchen each night. Then a stranger appears out of the blue. Devi, it appears, had a secret - one that touches many a nerve in her tightly wound family. Though exposing some shattering truths, the secret will also bring them back together in ways they never dreamed possible.

Interspersed with mouthwatering recipes, this story mixes humor, warmth, and leap-off-the-page characters into a rich stew of a novel that reveals a woman's struggle for acceptance from her family and herself.

About the Novel

When twenty seven years old Priya leaves her home in Silicon Valley to visit her family in India, she carries with her a secret; she has fallen in love with and is planning to marry an American man. But soon after her arrival in her native land, Priya learns that her mother and father have chosen a husband for her in the usual traditional way of an arranged marriage. Priya's world is instantly thrown into chaos as she must reconcile her passions and her parent's wishes.

Family Suggestions for Focused Study Abroad

Priya has come from a traditional family consisting of strict grandfather & grandma; ruling mother, understandable father and lovable brother. In Priya's grandfather's rule book

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duty was high on the list, and in Priya's, personal happiness was a priority. From this background she moves abroad for her higher studies getting strict instructions such as:

- Do not eat beef.
- Do not get too friendly with foreign people; you cannot trust them.
- Cook at home; there is no reason to eat out and waste money.
- Save money.

Last on the list, but most important - Do not find yourself some foreign man to marry.

Thoughts on Matrimony

Fate begins ruling over the rules. She meets Nick and lives with him. And her views on matrimony were shaped long before she came to America:

“Even though I was raised in a society where arranged marriages was the norm, I always thought it was barbaric to expect a girl of maybe twenty-one years to marry a man she knew even less than the milkman, who for the past decade, had been mixing water with the milk he sold the family”. (Page 1)

These thoughts on matrimony our heroine kept to herself.

After 7 years she gets back to India to reveal herself.

“I didn't want to go, I had to go” says Priya, “I didn't want to go because as soon as I got there, my family would descend on me like vultures on a fresh carcass, demanding explanations, reasons, and trying to force me into marital harmony with some “nice Indian boy”. I had to go because I had to tell them that I was marrying a ‘nice American man’.

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The Fruit of Her Memories

The one thing that she does look forward is the fruit of her memories – mangoes. When she was a child, summer was all about mangoes, rich, lush, ripe sweet mangoes with juice that would dribble down to her chin, hands and neck. The mango season coincides with the monsoons and the wedding season in India. They are symbolic of passion, heat, emotion and happiness; and indeed, growing up, Priya and her brother Nate called mangoes HAPPINESS. Young age without responsibilities gives us a period of Happiness.

How to Break the News?

Getting consent from her Grandfather is again a major step for Priya. Guilt shuts the doorway to let her tell the truth. If she reveals about Nick then she thinks that the whole family will reject her. Love will be curbed. Like the Janus figure with beards on both faces and frequently holding a key in his right hand, Priya's happiness, future lies in the hands of her grandfather; when he accepts, everyone will follow him and Priya's path will be clear.

Priya's dilemma becomes a personal torment when she cannot tell her family that she is engaged to an American, Like the Janus's two faces -- one seeing what is behind, and the other looking toward what lies ahead, Priya is forced to choose between the love of her family and Nick, the love of her life.

Tormenting Marriage Proposals for an Arranged Marriage

But Priya's relatives remain the same. Her mother and father insist that it's time they arranged her marriage to a "nice Indian boy." Her extended family talks of nothing but marriage – particularly the marriage of her uncle Anand with Neelima has kept them reeling.

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Not only did Anand marry a woman from another Indian State, but he also married for love. Happiness and love are not the point of her grandparents' or her parents' union.

Again this frightens her and she hides her secret, and this made her even to agree to a bride-seeing ceremony, but fortunately the person she met opens the pages of his life which made her put a protective shield on herself.

Janus the God of Doors, Beginnings and Endings

Like the Janus Gemius, a double – gated structure (one door facing the rising sun and the other, the setting sun). Priya's life is also double-sided; either she must fall or rise. If she wants to win the hearts of the family there will be a fall in her life, and she may lose Nick; but if she reveals herself and opens the gates, then she will rise and win the heart of Nick.

And finally she goes by the dictates of her heart and gets her father's consent followed by everyone.

Conclusion

The *Mango Season* is a panorama of Indian tradition. Malladi artfully places Priya in a situation between two opposite worlds. She reverts to childhood when faced with the knowledge that she will break her grandfather's heart with the betrayal of loving a foreigner. The young woman must ultimately decide between dogmatic tradition and heartfelt emotion.

As Janus is representative of the contemplation on the happenings of an old year while looking forward to the new, Priya fights her own battles and emerges scathed but victorious.

Malladi has captured a young woman's struggle to please her family, honor her past, and follow her feelings. *The Mango Season* is a trip into a complex cultural process of Indian girls of contemporary India who go in large numbers for study abroad.

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