

Representation and Interaction of Cow and Moon Myths in the Story of “Mah-Pishani”

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ABSTRACT

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Since long ago, myths have played a significant role in the conscious and unconscious of nations. Humans were always in contact with myths in their most basic contact with literature, i.e., children's stories and lullabies. The "Mahpishani" story is one of the ancient folk tales that was passed down from one generation to another, orally and in writing, throughout the Iranian culture and civilization. This story is full of Iranian myths and beliefs. The present study, which was carried out in a descriptive-analytical method and by library sources, mentions the moon and the cow myths and their function and interaction in the Mahpishani story. In addition, it was discussed how these two elements advance the story and prepare the story's main character for his journey to reach fertility and creation. Considering the representation of the moon and the cow as symbols of femininity and fertility and the narrative base of the "Mahpishani" story, these two archetypes are completely compatible with the story narration. The cow, the symbol of a being sacrificed myth, is a mother who has transformed.

With guidance, she leads her daughter to a well, the femininity symbol. The well and the cave have been symbols of femininity throughout history. At the well, the girl reveals her beautiful nature and finds merit in obtaining the moon, the fertility symbol, by washing her face with water.

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Introduction

Folklore serves as the foundational repository of a nation's collective consciousness, preserving its myths, traditions, and moral frameworks through generations. These narratives, often passed down orally or through children's literature, function as much more than mere entertainment; they are vehicles for the unconscious transmission of cultural values and cosmic truths. The story of "Mah-Pishani" (Moon-Forehead) is a quintessential Iranian folk tale that, while appearing to be a simple children's story, is deeply embedded with ancient mythological motifs. This research investigates the symbolic presence and the complex interaction between two central archetypes in the narrative: the Cow and the Moon. By decoding these symbols, the study aims to reveal how the story facilitates the protagonist's journey toward maturity, fertility, and the continuity of life.

Method

This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, utilizing a library-based approach to examine the text of the "Mah-Pishani" tale. The analysis is grounded in mythological and archetypal frameworks, drawing on the theories of scholars such as Mircea Eliade and Propp to interpret the symbolic functions of the characters and elements within the narrative. Specifically, the research focuses on the interplay between the archetypes of the "Sacrificial Cow" and the "Fertile Moon" to understand their roles in driving the plot and shaping the protagonist's character development.

Results

The analysis reveals a sophisticated mythological structure where the Cow and the Moon act as catalysts for the protagonist's transformation:

1. **The Archetype of the Cow (The Sacrificial Mother):** The Cow in the story is not merely an animal but a symbolic representation of the protagonist's mother, who undergoes a transformation after an accidental death. The Cow embodies the concept of the "sacrificial deity" common in ancient Iranian traditions (such as

Mithraism). Despite being targeted by the “evil” stepmother (a representation of Ahrimanic forces), the Cow serves as a protective guide. It provides magical assistance—transforming cotton into thread and guiding the protagonist to the well—thereby acting as the maternal force that nurtures the hero’s path.

۲. **The Archetype of the Moon (Fertility and Divinity):** The Moon emerges as the ultimate symbol of femininity, beauty, and fertility. The protagonist’s transformation occurs through a ritualistic cleansing in a well (a symbol of the feminine/womb) using “white/crystalline water.” This act results in the appearance of the Moon on her forehead, signifying her attainment of both inner virtue and outer beauty. The Moon acts as the bridge between the protagonist’s social status as a servant and her destiny as a royal bride, facilitating the transition into the stage of creation and procreation.
۳. **Mythological Interaction:** The interaction between the Cow and the Moon creates a cycle of life, death, and rebirth. The “death/sacrifice” of the Cow (the mother figure) is a necessary precursor to the “rebirth/blooming” of the Moon (the daughter’s maturity). The research finds that the Cow guides the daughter to the well (the feminine realm) where she encounters the Moon (fertility). This synergy ensures that the protagonist moves from a state of loss and servitude to a state of abundance and social integration (marriage and lineage).

Conclusion

The story of “Mah-Pishani” is a complex mythological tapestry that mirrors ancient Iranian beliefs regarding the cycles of nature and human life. The Cow represents the sacrificial maternal principle that provides guidance and sustenance, while the Moon represents the divine spark of fertility and the culmination of the feminine journey. Together, these archetypes drive the narrative toward a successful conclusion of marriage and the continuation of the human race. The study concludes that the seemingly simple motifs of the story serve to reinforce the profound cosmic necessity of fertility, life, and the triumph of order over chaotic, destructive forces. This symbolic decoding provides a roadmap for researchers to uncover the deeper, transcendental meanings embedded in folk literature.